



Vol 2 Don't Tell Me This Is the True History of the Three Kingdoms!

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Chapter 1: Don't tell me this is how I coincidentally save Cao Song

"How many days have we been marching now?"

"It's been 5 days, big brother." Yun Chang replied as she wiped the sweat streaming down her face.

So it's been 5 days since we left Luoyang huh.

But... No matter what, after 5 days of marching, we should be able to see a village if not a town or city, yet how could it be that we are in the middle of nowhere in the wilderness?

If I'd known it would be like this, I would have followed Gongsun Zan to You state. Though it was slightly far, it was still better than marching blindly.

Hai~~~ Under the sweltering heat, everyone was utterly deflated.

It was the same be it Yun Chang and the rest, or our troops at the back. But speaking of which, why do I get the feeling that the few hundred troops we had at the start was actually an inflated figure? No matter how I look, it feels like only a hundred or so.

But what was most critical now was the fact that we were neither soldiers belonging to the Imperial Court nor did we belong to any city. Even our original purpose of defeating the Yellow Turban Army no longer exists, so what exactly are we supposed to be now?

"In any case... Does anyone know where this is?" I looked about, hoping for an answer.

"Xuan De, I think this should be the shore of the Yangtze river..." Feng Xian said expressionlessly as she fondled the Red Hare, "We should be... Somewhere downstream."

She didn't have a single bead of sweat on her face at all, was it not hot?

"So tired... Ah?! There's a plum forest in front!!"

"Yi De don't run over! That's just a hill... Hua Tuo, help her cool down quick."

A familiar cliché flashed in my mind, though it was a little different from this.

"Oh, I got it. But... Where is Lord Yi De? ... Ah, this?"

"Lord Hua Tuo, Lord Yi De is in front. Please look more carefully, what you're touching now are my breasts." Zhang Liao said helplessly with a red face.

"Ah, please forgive me Lord Zhang Liao. Since I was touching breasts, then it can't be Lord Yi De." Hua Tuo quickly moved her hands away and slowly rode over to an angry Yi De.

Really, the heat this afternoon is definitely not normal, and if we aren't careful, we will run

the risk of a heat stroke.

Looks like we might have to set up camp earlier today... Though we have yet to find a suitable place to rest... How long more do we have to travel...

“What are you doing?!”

Un?

A harsh shout suddenly came from up ahead.

“Your lord sent you here to protect me yet you’re doing this, your lord...”

“Cut the crap! You’re so rich anyway, why not spare some for us poor folk huh~~~ Quick, hand it over!”

I looked over and saw a carriage being surrounded by several dozen soldiers.

“Is there a robbery happening up ahead?” I asked as I neared with the soldiers, and Yun Chang and the rest.

“I don’t know, but it’s definitely not something good.” Yun Chang was exhausted from the heat and constant travelling but when met with this, she immediately perked up and readied her stance as she wielded the Green Dragon Crescent Blade.

“Oi!! What are you all doing huh?” Yi De who was still affected by the heat could not wait any longer and yelled out at them even though we were still quite a distance away.

“Un? Who are you?” The one who was threatening the man before looked over with an arrogant look but upon seeing us, fear immediately appeared on his face.

“... Big brother, wait here for a bit,” Yun Chang said after thinking for a moment, before riding up leisurely alone— Yet no one from the other side dared to approach Yun Chang as she neared them. “Consider yourselves lucky, I’m different from Feng Xian and Yi De so I’ll ask first, what is it that you all are doing?”

“Do, do what?! Hehe, I, we are—” The man laughed and scratched his head as sweat streamed down his face. And then all of a sudden—

“Rob them!!”

As he yelled out the command, the hand which was scratching his head reached back and pulled out a sword which he swung towards Yun Chang.

It’s over. I don’t know who he is but to draw his sword against Yun Chang, he’s finished...

“...”

Ding Yun Chang blocked the blow with her **glaive** which she held in front of her.

“To think you can say such things so audaciously... You really cannot be saved.”

And as she said so, with just a simple, clean swing—

Wu! Just one blow, and that person fell without a single moan.

Though I still can't quite accept murder, such people do deserve to die and aren't worth pitying.

When the rest of the cronies saw their leader get killed, they ran off in all directions. Feng Xian wanted to chase them but I stopped her.

“Leave them be, we came to save these people, not to punish the robbers.” After I said so, I walked over to the middle-aged man who was threatened by the robbers and sized him up. Seeing as he was bringing all his possessions, and brought along quite a bit of money, he was probably uprooting and making a journey to a relative. “Are you all alright? Did you lose anything?”

“Ah, I'm fine, thank you all for saving us,” He said as he saluted us. “May I please ask for your names, so that I may one day return the favour to you all.”

(TL: Salute here means that gesture you see in shows or kungfu tournaments where they greet each other by cupping on closed fist in a hand.)

“There is no need to return the favour, Yun Chang did not save you for the sake of any reward.” Feng Xian replied immediately and calmly while she fondled the Red Hare.

(TL: Dude, stop molesting the dog.)

Indeed that was the case. Though hearing it from Feng Xian first was a little surprising.

“I am Liu Bei Liu Xuan De, and I'm still a... Prefect, though I don't know if the Imperial Court still recognises me as such.” I said as I laughed dryly.

Should be. I should still be the Prefect of Anxi county.

“May I ask your...”

Before I could finish, that person quickly stood up and introduced himself as he bowed.

“Ah, I am Cao Song. While Emperor Ling was still reigning, I was the Minister of Finance. Due to the recent chaos these few years in the Imperial Court, I returned to my hometown to rest as I was ill. These few days I heard that the rebels at Chang'an have been cleaned out so I'm heading over to where my daughter is.”

(TL: Emperor Ling is the previous Han Emperor and also father of what will be the last Emperor of Han.)

It's only been a few days, and those rebels in Chang'an have been wiped out? ... Looks swift

is an understatement for Meng De.

But Cao Song? Why does this name seem so familiar...

"May I ask who your daughter is..." Yun Chang asked.

"Ah, my daughter huh," Cao Song gave a proud smile as he stroked his goatee, "You all may not believe it, but the one who destroyed the Chang'an rebels is my daughter!"

Eh?!

"Then, your daughter is Meng, Meng De?!"

I couldn't, no I didn't dare to believe it immediately.

"Aiya? You all know my daughter?!" Cao Song's eyes gleamed as he shook my hand profusely and looked at us as though we were his family.

I really didn't think it would be Meng De's father.

"Ah, we were indeed colleagues of Meng De for a few days..."

I replied as I endured the pain from my hands. I have to say, this old man really doesn't know how to control his strength. My hands are almost numb from his shaking.

"Oh, so it's like that. My daughter must have troubled you all quite a bit."

"No way!" I hurriedly replied on hearing this. "Many things were resolved all thanks to Meng De, without whom we really wouldn't know what to do."

"... Hnn hnn." The old man suddenly chuckled for some reason, "Hearing such praise from you means that Meng De is quite honest in front of you huh."

"Eh? What do you mean?"

"My daughter has never been very forthcoming since young." Cao Song said as he gave a helpless laugh. "Whether it's her brothers and sisters in the clan or her subordinate generals, she has never been willing to say what she thinks. Of course, the price to pay for this is unnecessary suspicion from those around her and so she doesn't have many friends."

(TL: I know I use certain words a lot, but that's because the author does it too. And I'm not just talking about what he wants to express, he uses the exact same word as well.)

As he said so, Cao Song looked at me with kind eyes. I must say, as Meng De's father, Cao Song really knows her well.

"Though there were many times that I wasn't able to fully understand her intentions, I can more or less guess what she was thinking. At the very least, I feel that your daughter is not as awkward as you say she is."

“Keke, is that so! Is that so! That’s good! That’s very good!” Cao Song said meaningfully as he slapped my shoulders.

“Please be careful on your journey and I hope you don’t run into robbers again.” I frowned as I looked at Cao Song, and at the carriage full of items and money. “It is now a time of chaos, you must find some reliable retainers.”

“Un un, I understand full well... But those people just now weren’t robbers, though they weren’t all that different from robbers anyway.”

“Eh, what was that?” “They aren’t robbers?”

“But this fellow did clearly state that he was committing robbery.”

Yun Chang didn’t get it either as she said so while pointing to the dead person on the ground.

“He was originally a subordinate general of the Governor of Xu state, Tao Qian. When I passed through Xu state, Tao Qian sent him to be my bodyguard but I didn’t expect that he would succumb to greed halfway.” Cao Song said as he herded his family up the carriage. “I would stay and chat but I have to leave soon. The journey to Chang’an is still long...”

“Un, please send my regards to Meng De.”

I saluted as I said so.

Cao Song only smiled in response before he left. As a show of respect, we watched the carriage until it left our field of vision.

Un... Cao Song huh, I actually have quite the impression about this person. I had after all tried to read the Romance of the Three Kingdoms after all but I was overwhelmed by the sheer number of names.

(TL: This is my experience as well. But at least with Romance of the Three Kingdoms, you can skip through most of the names as the key people will keep popping up anyway and their names will stick. In the case of Water Margin, I really had a hard time following the story as I have issues with remembering names and every member of the 108 have important parts here and there!)

... Wait, Cao Song?

Cao Song!!

I remember now!

In the history I remember, was, wasn’t he... Wasn’t he killed here? But he was saved by us here?!

“Ah!!” A sudden cry from behind scared the wits out of me, and I turned to see Hua Tuo,

who was squatting down and looking at the dead person with a shocked face, pointing at him as she said, "I know this person, he used to be from the Yellow Turban Army as well.... His name is probably... Zhang Kai!!"

(TL: Zhang Kai is a Yellow Turban who didn't achieve much, went to Tao Qian after the rebellion was quashed and attacked Cao Song when he was sent to protect him before fleeing into the mountains. Yeah, that doesn't make sense to me either but he's not important so don't think too much about it.)

He's someone Hua Tuo knows? Then that means he surrendered after the rebellion...

"Hua Tuo, do you know him well?"

"No, not really. I've only heard of him, he's from the south." Hua Tuo said as she touched his neck. "... No more breath huh."

"You want to save him?" Yun Chang asked.

"I am a physician after all." Hua Tuo laughed helplessly, before heaving a long sigh as she got up. "But he's dead for sure and he hasn't been doing much good anyway."

Hua Tuo didn't seem to take much pity on this person. Though he was her former subordinate, looking at Hua Tuo's eyes that seems like the person on the ground was a stranger, I know that when Hua Tuo said she did not manage the national Yellow Turban movement, it was true.

(TL: Just a reminder that this silly short-sighted girl is supposedly a mystic warrior and a former farmer who led a national uprising.)

But, the real issue here was Cao Song's survival.

"Big brother? What's wrong? You don't look too good." Yi De said with concern as she looked at me.

"Ah? ... Ah, it's fine, the heat just got to me."

... It should be fine.

One more person alive is just one more person alive, and it's not like I can't save him when I see it in front of me.

(TL: Experienced light/web novel readers will recognise this as an event flag. And you're right, which is why I'm leaving the explanation for Cao Song's event for later as the follow-up events will be covered in later chapters.)

"Are you alright?"

"I'm fine I'm fine, no need to worry. Let us be on our way too."

As I responded to Yi De's concerned words, I started leading the way and Yi De and the rest followed without asking further.

...

Now then, back to our original question, where is the nearest city?

"Does anyone know where we are?" I asked again.

"Xuan De, this should be the shore of the Yellow River."

"Feng Xian, don't think that I'll accept your answer just like that just because you switched to a river slightly north of the one you said before."

All of a sudden, our future seemed bleak.

"Xuan De!!!"

"Un?"

Why was there someone calling me?

I looked toward where the sound came from but this voice was...

"Lord Gongsun?!!"

"Aiya, we know each other so long already. Why are you still so distant? Just call me Bo Gui." Gongsun Zan said as she ran over happily with her troops.

As she walked up to me, she nodded vigorously.

"Ah~ It really has been a while since we've met huh~~~"

It's only been 5 days right...

"Yes, Lord Xuan De is the same as always huh." Zi Long from behind smiled as she saluted me.

"Zi Long is doing well too huh."

I saluted back.

"But didn't Lord Gongsun return to You state? Why did you come back here?" Yun Chang asked.

On hearing this, Gongsun Zan suddenly became a little embarrassed.

"Maa, how should I put it? I guess I'm just too strong." Gongsun Zan twisted about as she scratched her hair. "Kong Rong, the Administrator of Beihai, has been blockaded and needs me to save him..."

“Actually, it’s only because Yuan Shao won’t send help, and Han Fu’s supplies are insufficient that they have no choice but to ask for our help...” Zi Long supplemented with words which utterly destroyed Gongsun Zan’s bubble.

“Haa, that really is troubling for you all huh...”

“Really, I hadn’t even had a chance to sit down back home when Kong Rong’s subordinate came calling.” Gongsun Zan said, though I didn’t feel like she felt that it was troublesome in the least. And thereafter, she revealed someone from behind her. “Taishi Ci, this is Liu Bei Liu Xuan De, he is a very good person~~~ Xuan De, this is Taishi Ci, the one who came asking for help.”

“My, my name is Taishi Ci. Please treat me kindly, Lord Liu Bei.” The girl said politely and respectfully.

“Ah, please treat me kindly as well, Lord Taishi Ci.” I gave my greetings as I saluted Taishi Ci as well.

Taishi Ci huh... I’d thought Taishi Ci would be a musclebound man, but Taishi Ci is a girl too.

The girl didn’t seem to be very old, and was about my age but slightly older. She has faint pink hair, with a neatly cropped fringe that was part of her mushroom haircut. On her back were 2 short spears, and perhaps it was because of the resulting weight, she always used her hands to support the base of the spears. She was also constantly frowning, and seemed to give off a feeling like she was a timid creature.

(TL: Please don’t ask me why Taishi Ci’s character design picture shows her holding 2 ribbon-like things instead of spears.)

“Speaking of which, Xuan De, where are you all headed to?”

For some reason, I have an ominous feeling...

“We were planning in finding a—”

“Why don’t you come with me to Beihai!”

“Wu...”

... I just know something troublesome would come up.

Since she directly invited me even before I could finish, she probably doesn’t plan on letting me go anywhere else.

But it’s still better not to accept.

“About that, I won’t...”

“Come with me!”

Gongsun Zan's eyes were gleaming, and she seemed to be expecting my agreement.

I helplessly looked toward Zi Long who was behind Gongsun Zan and she put her hands together and nodded equally helplessly.

"I too hope that Lord Liu Bei can come as well, as the more fighting strength we have, the better." Taishi Ci said with resolute eyes, as she awaited my answer.

In addition, after she finished, she shifted her gaze to Gongsun Zan and frowned even more deeply, as if to say that 'only Gongsun Zan is no good.'

Ah, what to do~~~

"Xuan De, let's go. Lord Gongsun is already asking us like that." Feng Xian walked over to persuade me, probably out of guilt from what happened in Sishui Pass.

"Little sister and the rest of the troops are utterly exhausted. If we break Beihai's blockade, we can enter the city and rest there." Yun Chang added as she nodded.

"Un... How far is here from Beihai?"

"Ah, not far. Just an hour's walk and we can reach Beihai." Gongsun Zan seemed to have seen hope and immediately replied me.

That is to say that even if I don't agree to go, I'll probably arrive at a besieged Beihai city anyway.

"... Then, shall we go?"

I looked at everyone in turn, and they all nodded.

Alright, we'll go.

In the end, I still followed Gongsun Zan's will and agreed.

"Ah... Words cannot express how grateful I am." Just as I finished, Taishi Ci covered her mouth with her hands as she saluted with tears in her eyes.

You don't need to be that touched right.

"Oh!!" For some reason, Gongsun Zan was the happiest of all of them. "Like this I can be together with Xuan De for a time again."

"My lord, for this expedition, you musn't give Lord Xuan De trouble."

"Yes!"

From my point of view, doesn't Zi Long seem more like the master?

“Ah, I see a large contingent of troops.”

“Yi De? What nonsense are you spouting again?”

I said helplessly. Looks like Yi De really has been affected by the heat.

“My lord, Lord Yi De’s words doesn’t seem to be nonsense.” Zhang Liao said as she pointed ahead. “Look!”

“Ah?”

I squinted my eyes and finally saw it, a large contingent of troops straight ahead.

“That is the army that is blockading Beihai!” Taishi Ci’s eyes changed in an instant, as she wielded her twin spears and readied her stance. “Seems like they noticed we are the reinforcements and they are initiating an attack on seeing that our numbers are insufficient.”

As soon as Taishi Ci finished, everyone had prepared their weapons.

Gongsun Zan’s expression was like as usual as she yelled to her troops, “All troops at the ready!!”

And in the next moment, the deafening charge of our troops would resound like thunder.

... Oh well, at least we don’t have to run around aimlessly.

Chapter 2: Don't tell me this is a short stay at Beihai

"You broke the blockade? So quickly?!" We followed Taishi Ci to Kong Rong's official residence and she made for us to wait outside before she went in first to report. Thereafter, we heard this loud male voice resounding from the building.

Just going from the voice, this Kong Rong should be a man. Though when I realised this, I felt like it was going against logic for some reason.

There were further discussions going on inside, and after a while, Taishi Ci slowly walked out and spoke to us, "Apologies for making you all wait. You may come in now, please follow me."

Taishi Ci guided us in once she finished.

"Really, even though he's the one who has been desperately seeking help, now that he's had our help, he still has the gall to make us wait outside like that."

"Yi De, don't say that." I said as I rubbed her head, "No matter what, he is still an Administrator and must still keep up appearances."

"I wonder what kind of person Administrator Kong Rong is." Yun Chang said as she thought. "If possible, I would hope for him to allow us to stay here for a bit, as we have nowhere to go after all."

"... Un, I will bring this up with him later."

"Xuan De, you still haven't found a place to rest yet?" Gongsun Zan said with surprise. "Then why were you so unwilling to come with me to You state huh~~~"

"It's too far." I said with a helpless smile.

Just looking at the result, even if we went to You state, we would still be here with you. And if we went with you to You state, though we would have a destination, the journey would become even longer.

We continued walking inside the building, and after 2 doors, we finally arrived at the main hall of the official residence.

"This is it, Lord Kong Rong is awaiting inside." Taishi Ci said before entering the main hall.

Un? Why is there such a nice smell...

"Oh~~~" Just then we saw a man with a small beard run up to us. "To my saviours, Kong Rong has been rude in his reception. Please, come right in."

Seeing his clothing, and his manner of speech which was polite and formal, I could tell that he is an experienced official.

Unlike us who were wearing casual and rough clothing, he was wearing the proper official uniform. And though he kept a small beard, and had a big round belly, he still had a thick cultured aura about him. If he were 10 years younger, he would definitely be a celebrated student.

Now he should be a famous scholar. The young Kong Rong was after all, an exemplar student for children.

“Ah, it’s nothing it’s nothing. For Lord Kong Rong to judge that I, Gongsun Zan, am worth enough, how could I refuse? And so I rushed here as soon as I heard the news.”

Gongsun Zan also replied in the same manner, though it seemed a bit funny hearing it from her.

“Hahaha, I’m not such an impressive person.” Kong Rong laughed as he stroked his beard... Seems like this person gets disgusting when he’s praised.

“Please follow me. We can speak when we’re inside. I have already prepared the food and drink.”

Kong Rong then guided us in as he finished laughing.

Ah~ No wonder there’s such a nice smell, because the reception banquet is already set up. Though if he had the time for all this, why didn’t he come out to receive us? That would have been a better show of sincerity.

Though I must say I am surprised at Gongsun Zan. Even though she is usually so silly and carefree, she must be quite experienced and adept in dealing with officials and feudal lords and the like seeing how she responded so well to Kong Rong–

(Zi Long, how was that? I remembered the words you told me to say perfectly, though I don’t know what they mean.)

(My lord, please don’t brag about this. This should be something you come up with on your own. If you had screwed up, we know what awaits you when we go back.)

(Wu...)

...

I was still praising her in my heart, but upon hearing their whispering, I felt that changing my opinion of Gongsun Zan was foolish thinking.

“Wa~~~” Just as I was thinking about this, Yi De who was beside me let out a sigh of amazement. “This table of food is simply too magnificent!”

“Hahaha, it’s nothing much, nothing much.” Kong Rong laughed again, “Come come come, eat.”

And as he said so, he went ahead to sit at the head of the table while we went to sit at the sides.

The table was very large, and could easily seat all 10 of us with much room to spare. Yi De's description of the food was no exaggeration, and though I could not identify the dishes, I could tell they were good just by looking.

Ever since I came to this era, I've never eaten well. Just having fish and meat was already considered a luxury.

Well then, time to dig in.

Let's try this first... Un, delicious indeed.

I looked around at everyone as I ate, and saw that everyone was delightfully partaking in the delicious meal.

"Speaking of which, how did you all defeat that army?" Kong Rong began the conversation afresh as he ate, "I was late in awaking today and I heard that they were going to attack you while I was eating breakfast but by the time I finished, I found that you had already entered the city..."

"Big sister, you must try this, it feels different from the meat we usually eat."

"That's not meat, it's tofu..."

"My lord, carrying the Red Hare while you eat is a bit rude... Ah! It touched me! I'm going to die!"

"Red Hare is very cute, so no problem."

Wang!

"Eh~~~ There are carrots! I hate carrots!"

"My lord, will you eat some vegetables? Don't just eat rice."

"Zi Long, you really are rude. If you're a northerner you got to eat rice!"

"Umm, will you all please listen to me? Don't just focus on eating, alright?!" Kong Rong gave an awkward smile as he saw that no one paid him any heed.

"Ah, my, my lord, our saviours were truly heroic." Taishi Ci hurriedly replied upon seeing her lord being ignored. "I was planning on dispersing the army to form a circular formation to meet the enemy's charge but before I could say anything, they all charged into the enemy. I thought we would be utterly defeated but who knew that they successfully penetrated enemy lines and scattered them."

"Oh~~~ But weren't you all severely outnumbered?"

"It's nothing, it's nothing~~~" Yi De said as she age, "Fighting spirit can overcome the problem of numbers."

(TL: The original fiction version was pretty much the same, except Taishi Ci had set out to find Liu Bei rather than Gongsun Zan. Again, those who surrounded Beihai were just Yellow Turban remnants, so the numbers issue isn't as big.)

"Is that so? That's the first time I heard of this." Kong Rong said, seemingly convinced, and he took out a bamboo scroll from a drawer and began making a note of this... What a conscientious person.

"Ah, everyone, for saving me in a time of need, how should I repay you all~~~" Kong Rong said with a hint of fake melancholy as he put down the bamboo scroll and raised his wine cup.

"That's easy, just give me all of Beihai– Ouch!"

Before Gongsun Zan could finish her words, Zi Long physically interrupted her.

"Please eat my lord... Ah Lord Kong Rong, my lord means to form an alliance with you, against both Lord Yuan Shao and Lord Cao Cao."

"Ah... That is doable..." Kong Rong smiled helplessly before clinking cups with everyone. He drank all his wine before turning to me. "You must be Liu Bei Liu Xuan De right~~~~"

Heh~~~ I didn't think that people knew me.

"You know me?"

"Aiya, just a while ago didn't we embark on the Dong Zhuo campaign together~~~ I too was one of the 18 feudal lords there~~~~"

"Oh, that time was really..."

No impression at all~~~

I left my sentence hanging and did not continue.

"But I was originally seeking aid from Gongsun Zan, so I don't know why Lord Liu Bei came as well."

"Ah? Ah, we ran into each other on the road, and I followed her." Speaking of which, now was a good time to make my request, "Ah, umm... I have something to say but I don't know if it is appropriate..."

"Just say it~" Kong Rong said as he waved his sleeve in a grand gesture.

"Actually I was hoping that you would let us stay here for a few days. We haven't had a proper resting place in a while now."

“Eh? Xuan De, you aren’t returning with me to You state?”

“My lord, Lord Xuan De has his considerations.”

I nodded toward Gongsun Zan who seemed a little sad. You state was really too far and I was abhorrent to making the trip. Moreover, I don’t recall Liu Bei ever going to You state. If I did go, it might be a bit strange.

(TL: You have Lu Bu under you among other things, and you don’t think that’s strange?)

“I don’t know if Lord Kong Rong is...” I turned to look at Kong Rong.

“Oh that’s nothing, stay, stay.” He laughed as he said so. “My Beihai is rather peaceful and nice.”

“Yes, I have heard tell of Lord Kong Rong’s stories.”

“Oh? And what have you heard.” Kong Rong asked enthusiastically, and seemed like he had found an opportunity to hear more praise of himself.

So you do want me to say it huh...

“Ah... I heard you gave away pears when you were young? Was there such a thing?”

(TL: Kong Rong giving away pears is one of those short stories you tell kids to teach them values, something like the story about Washington chopping down the cherry tree. The story goes that his father wanted to give his children pears and Kong Rong, being the most brilliant of all, got first pick. He picked the smallest one and his father asked him why. He said that he did not pick the largest as he is not the eldest and those ought to go to his older brothers and he picked the smallest so that his younger brothers could get a bigger pear.)

“Wu!” As I said so, I could see Kong Rong’s colour drain from his face and he only replied after a while as he chuckled, “Is, is that do... Though I don’t know where you heard that from, but you actually know of such a tasteless matter...”

“Eh?”

I could feel something wrong from the air.

“Aiya...” Taishi Ci had ‘it’s over’ written all over her face.

What’s wrong? Could it be I pushed a button that I shouldn’t have? But wouldn’t one think of him giving away his pears when one spoke of Kong Rong?

“Lord Liu Bei, though I’ve given you due respect, it seems you take me for nothing... And you actually dragged out something from the past to make fun of me...” Kong Rong stood up and took 2 steps.

“Make... Make fun of?”

Why were these words being used to describe what I said...

“Stop the act!”

“Eh?!!! I really don’t know what you’re talking about...”

I waved my hands in front of me but Kong Rong continued to point at me.

“You must be laughing at me deep down now! Because I gave pears with worms to my elders!”

“Ah? No no no, I’m not...”

“Uwaa!!!”

Before I could finish, I was met with a disgusting sight of Kong Rong running away into the building in tears.

... To think there was such a underside to that tale... If I’d know that it would be like this, I would have said something like him being the descendent of Confucius or something.”

(TL: I’m sure everyone knows who Confucius is right? Kong Rong is the 20th generation descendent of Confucius, or Kong Zi.)

“Lord Kong Rong! Ah, please don’t mind this. The incident of ‘giving away pears’ is the one flaw to Lord Kong Rong’s perfect self-image. Everyone in Beihai commandery knows this, and it will be okay after some time.”

Taishi Ci said as she smiled helplessly, in an effort to ameliorate the awkward atmosphere.

“Umm, should we go and placate him?” I felt guilty as I had not expected that things would be like this.

“Ah, it’s fine.” Taishi Ci waved her hand, and picked up her chopsticks again. “Let, let us continue eating.”

Though we still more or less felt awkward, we still picked up our chopsticks and resumed eating.

Kong Rong never returned to the table.

“Hai~~~~~” I went up to the roof alone to get some fresh air after I finished eating and sighed when I thought of what I said earlier. “Looks like the matter of staying here is over.”

Must I really go with Gongsun Zan to You state? I have no choice though, Gongsun Zan is the only one willing to take me in now.

“Lord Liu Bei? Why are you here?”

I looked over to the one who called me.

“Ah, Taishi Ci, I’m just taking in some fresh air. Speaking of which, don’t you have to go and placate your lord?” I asked.

“Un? Lord Kong Rong is not my lord. I’m just here to lend a hand.”

“Eh?”

This was surprising...

“My mother received many favours from Kong Rong as a farmer, and when she saw the blockade, she implored me to help him... Maa, I do have some small fame in Beihai after all.” She said as she moved the twin short spears behind her.

(TL: This account is the same as the original fiction.)

“And so you just helped him out as a retainer.”

I said to finish her words, but Taishi Ci didn’t seem to like what I said as she frowned at my words.

“Un~~ How do I put it? Lord Kong Rong is a good Administrator but he isn’t the one I want to serve.”

“Why is that? Do you not see something to fight for in him?”

“Ah, I don’t really understand such difficult concepts. To be honest, I don’t even know what I want to fight for.” Taishi Ci said with irritation, “I just feel that serving under Lord Kong Rong feels very empty, as though I’m not living to my fullest... Ah, no, I’m sorry, I seem to have spoken out of turn!”

Taishi Ci seemed slightly withdrawn as she realised what she said.

“No, I think that way of thinking is correct.”

“Is, is that so, hahaha...” Taishi Ci said as she scratched her head.



I can more or less understand where Taishi Ci is coming from. Though Kong Rong is more than capable enough of bringing peace, stability and prosperity to Beihai commandery, he is

a model official who keeps to his position without acting out of turn, which makes it difficult for him to assume greater responsibilities that extend to the whole nation. It can be said that while he is a capable person, he is not ambitious while someone like Gongsun Zan was ambitious but lacked the capabilities. What Taishi Ci was seeking for, was someone with both ambition and capability.

“... I think you can go to Jiangdong, you may find the one you seek there.”

“Jiangdong... Is it?” Taishi Ci leaned her head to the side in a very cute gesture. “If you’re talking about Jiangdong, then that means Liu Yao and Sun Jian right.”

“Un, when the time comes, it will be up to you.”

I replied as I shrugged. I had thought of asking her to join me but I felt like I might not be the one she was looking for and did not mention this.

She was Taishi Ci after all.

“Excuse me, is Lord Liu Bei here?”

I turned when I heard someone call me... It’s a military courier.

“... Ah, yes, I’m here.”

“Lord Kong Rong wishes to see you.”

He wants to see me? Could it be that he has calmed down?

“Go on Lord Liu Bei.” Taishi Ci smiled as she spoke to me. “As for what you told me, I’ll consider it.”

“I won’t pursue the matter of ‘giving away pears’. It seems you don’t know what it means either.” Kong Rong said as he sat on the main seat and wrote with a brush. “As for my acting up, please forget what you saw.”

“Ah, it’s the best if you understand.”

Looks like he has calmed down, I was still afraid of what might happen...

“But you will not be staying here.”

“Un...”

As expected, he still bears a grudge.

“What is with that look of yours, I do not mean to drive you away.” Kong Rong smiled as he looked at me. “I mean to have you and your troops camp at Qi commandery since Beihai city has nowhere you can camp at and I can’t possibly let you camp outside the city.”

“Ah, so that’s what you mean...”

“Un, that’s how it is. You can start packing up and getting ready.” He seemed to have finished writing and set down his brush before speaking in a low voice. “Honestly, I think you are a rare talent and a true hero, and I respect you for that. But it is because of that, I can only let you stay here for a short while. If you keep staying on here, then my place as an Administrator will be a bit tenuous... I hope you understand where I’m coming from.”

Kong Rong did not continue after that. Up till now, I still can’t tell if Kong Rong is antagonistic or otherwise.

But this is probably how it is as an official in the Imperial Court.

“... I understand, and thank you for the short time we will be in your care, Lord Kong Rong.”

No matter what it is, it’s good as long as we are talking terms.

I deeply bowed, before making my way out.

As I walked out of the building, I looked up to the sky. It was terribly hot, and sweat streamed down profusely from my head. When I thought about the days to come, I could not see what might come and felt like we could only follow where fate would take us.

Thereafter, we took the whole afternoon to pack up and re-supply before we headed off to Qi commandery.

“Lord Gongsun Zan seems to have gone back this time, but you were with Kong Rong then so you missed her when she left.” Zhang Liao said. “When she left, Lord Gongsun Zan told us to tell you to ‘come over to You state to play sometime okay~~~’ or something like that.”

“Is that so.” I laughed as I replied, and felt very amused at Zhang Liao’s imitation of Gongsun Zan’s mannerisms.

But Gongsun Zan is as optimistic and happy-go-lucky as always huh. I wonder when we will meet again.

“That Lord Kong Rong, though he acts like a benevolent person, he is actually quite petty huh.”

“Little sister, you shouldn’t say that. Letting big brother and us go to Qi commandery is already fairly good.”

“Qi commandery is not too far, and we should be there soon.” Feng Xian said as she held the map in one hand and Red Hare in the other. “We should be able to get there before nightfall if we keep at this pace.”

Wang!

“I hope we get there soon, I might fall asleep if not~~~” Hua Tuo said as she stifled a yawn.

Looking at everyone, I gave a helpless smile. In my heart, I made my resolve to acquire a proper base for us soon.

Chapter 3: Don't tell me this is just before going to Xu state

TL: Apart from MCs who were thrown into tragic/harsh scenarios like Shield Hero, this guy has it pretty bad. Apart from his harem, whom he can't really touch even if he wants to because having them go out of combat means a severe loss of fighting strength, his life quite literally sucks.

"Eh! Eh!" I swung my hoe over and over while sweat dripped down my head into the soil. Though it quickly evaporated from the heat, there was so much that some still seeped into the soil.

"Big brother, are you okay?"

"If you really can't do anymore, then rest for a bit first."

"Not everyone is suited for ploughing the fields after all, maybe Xuan De is one of those who isn't."

"Don't say anymore, as a man, if I can't even plough the fields while all you girls can, I might as well not live!" I squeezed out these words between gasps.

Except for Hua Tuo, all the other girls and the soldiers were ploughing the fields. We don't know how long we will stay here but we can't just eat without compensating the people here, and so we offered our labour in return for food and lodging.

Though the land allocations were basically the same, all my female comrades were at least twice as fast as I was in ploughing. Its been almost half a month already yet I have not been able to catch up to their speed in the least.

As expected, living a cushy city life has not prepared me at all for farm work. Leaving aside my chapped hands, the idea of being at the mercy of mother nature for my crops is highly demoralising for me.

But the troops were very happy when they received their allocated land, and even now they were hard at work ploughing the fields. Perhaps this is because of their roots.

But I too gradually understood their joy. In this era without pesticide, tractors and other tools and technology, one can only rely on his own 2 hands and the feeling when one sees the crystallisation of one's hard work is truly fulfilling.

I raised my head and used the hand towel on my shoulder to wipe my sweat. I looked at the girls and saw that they were still looking at me with concern.

"Don't worry about me. You all should take a rest when you finish your work. I'll take care of my own."

After I finished, I lowered my head and continued to plough while my sweat fell to the soil.

“Hu~~~” I got up and straightened my back after some time and looked around only to find that everyone had done their work and had left. At this sight, I once again returned to my work so I could finish before lunch.

It wasn't that I was afraid that I wouldn't get my share, rather, I was afraid that no one would start until I returned. Since we started ploughing, even when I returned in the late afternoon, especially in the first few days, after my work was done, the girls would still be waiting for me to eat lunch together.

I felt really bad about this and tried to talk them into eating first but they had no intention of doing so.

As I thought of this, I looked up to the sky. It was still quite a while before noon sharp so I'm still on time, I thought as I ploughed on.

“Yo~~ Lord Liu Bei is still hard at work huh.”

An old farmer from another field who had finished his work called out to me.

“Ah, yes because I'm slow.” I said with a helpless smile and continued my work.

“Take your time, no need to rush. Nobody was good at it when they first started.”

“Though you are an official, you are still willing to farm with rest of us. If only all the other officials were just like you.”

“I already said I'm not an official~~~”

I wasn't being humble here, I really wasn't an official anymore. I had even sent someone to Anxi county to check things out recently, and found that my name was removed. So the me now has no official rank at all.

“Lord Liu Bei is saying such things again. If you're not an official, why would Lord Kong Rong let you stay here?” Another farmer piped in. “Though this part is not particularly developed, this is the most prosperous and peaceful place next to Beihai city. Not just any general would be allowed to stay here.”

“Eh~~~”

That is to say, Kong Rong is actually looking out for me?

If that's the case then what I said before was really inappropriate. But this might also be because of my 'righteous looks'.

Because it's Liu Bei that everyone sees me as kind and benevolent? Because it's Liu Bei that people think I'm worthy?

I don't really want to acknowledge it but this might be a joke that history is playing on me.

“We’ll be heading back first, fight on Lord Liu Bei!”

“Oh!” I replied with gusto, though it didn’t have any effect on my actual stamina which was heavily depleted, and I could only struggle on with my hoe.

I looked at the unploughed earth left ahead of me. About 10 meters odd more, looks like I’m close to completion.

Maybe I should take a short break... Ah, no. Too dangerous, such thoughts are detrimental.

Because there was virtually no one around for as far as I could see, it was exceptionally quiet and all I could hear were the cries of insects—

“Eh~~~ Eh~~~”

— Another dry and tired voice from a fellow farmer.

Was there someone else hard at work ploughing as well?

Who could it be? The past few days I remember being alone by this time~~~

As I thought so, I searched for the source of the sound and found her in a large paddy field behind me

A girl?!

An ordinary girl about my age was ploughing what seemed to be a very large field by herself.

She was just as skilled as me, that is to say not at all, and was even wearing a dress which extended to her knees and had collected a fair bit of dirt.

“Oi!” Because it was a little distant, I yelled out to her and she slowly raised her head to look at me. “Are you ploughing such a large field by yourself?”

“Un? Me?” She looked left and right and found that no one was around. “Ah, yes I’m ploughing this part alone.”

She actually was doing all that alone.

By the looks of it, she was probably going to have to plough till night time.

“Is it always you who ploughs there?”

“No.” She shook her head, “My father passed away from illness just 2 days ago and I’m here today in place of him. I usually go pick herbs in the mountains.”

Passed away from illness? What illness? What about your mother?

I was a little shocked at this unexpected reply and what appeared in my head were logical

follow-up questions which anyone would have. But I did not plan on asking these and tried to think about something else to say but couldn't think of anything.

"... Let's do a good job, fight on." In the end, I could only say an utterly useless sentence.

"Un!" She replied with a smile.

... Maa, don't think about her anymore, just keep at it and you'll be done soon.

"Eh~~~... Eh~~~"

Even more helpless and tired cries than my own could be heard.

...

— Really.

"I'll help you." By the time I came to a decision, I had already walked over to her.

"Eh?" She was stunned for a moment and I held her hoe. "Have a short rest, you look even worse at this than I am. By the way, your dress is quite dirty already."

Hai~~~ What am I doing huh?! I hadn't even completed my own work yet I took up an even greater task.

"That isn't an issue. If it's dirty then I just have to wash it." She looked at the dirt on her dress and then at the me who had begun ploughing. "How, how can I let you do that? This should be my work."

"Maa, as a fellow beginner to farming, take it as a sort of encouragement from me." I smiled bitterly at the words I said which seemed comical even to me.

I hadn't even finished my own work after all.

"... You really are a good person huh~~~" She suddenly said after ploughing beside me for some time.

Eh?

I looked over and saw a radiant smile on her that was both warm and kind.

"... Because I'm Liu Bei?" I replied sarcastically on instinct.

"Liu Bei? So your name is Liu Bei huh~~~" She said with emotion in her voice.

"You didn't know?"

Nods.

That is to say, that it's not because of my name that she thinks I'm a good person.

"Is it because I'm helping you plough your field?" I asked as I swung the hoe down yet again.

"Un~~~ There is that." She paused in thought. "But that's not all. I could feel that you are a good person the moment I saw you."

"Hahaha, were you brainwashed by an uncle called 'history' to 'feel that this person is a good person when you see him'? How come I don't feel like I look like a good person?"

"What is that?" She felt that I was joking, though I was indeed, but not in the way she thought. "If I have to say why, it's your expression."

"Expression?"

"Un, you give a dependable feeling, and you don't have any sense of superiority or inferiority to others. You are confident though there is a hint of timidity in that confidence."

"... You can go into the business of physiognomy."

(TL: Reading faces.)

"What is that? She felt that I was joking, though I wasn't.

To be able to read so much detail from a face, I must say I'm impressed.

"Big brother?~~~~"

Just then, I heard a familiar voice coming from the field I was supposed to plough.

Was it Yun Chang?

"Yun Chang~~ I'm here~~~"

I yelled out to Yun Chang and she came running over with a relieved look.

"I was still worried about what happened to big brother but it turns out you came over here to play."

"I'm not playing, I came here to help... Though I haven't completed my work yet."

"Eh~~~" Yun Chang sighed as a helpless smile floated on her face. "Not even completing your own work before helping others, and the task you took on is not small either... But, as expected of big brother huh~"

"Are you praising me or scolding me huh~~~"

I said as I laughed but Yun Chang only smiled in response and neither affirmed nor denied it.

"Un, this person is—"

"Ye, yes, I'm the one who owns this plot of land. He saw that I was slow and came to help me."

"Hou hou~~~ But you really don't know how to plough huh~~~" Yun Chang said as she took a look at her dress, "But never mind... Big brother, you aren't too good at it either, so let me do it."

"Ah..."

Yun Chang took her hoe and used highly adept ploughing techniques that were completely unlike my own to plough the field.

"Oh~~~ Impressive!" That girl sighed in amazement. "Even though she looks about as old as me~~~"

"Maa, people are different in their own ways and you wouldn't be considered inferior in any way, just ordinary." I said to the girl as I stopped ploughing so I wouldn't get in Yun Chang's way, "Yun Chang and the others around me are all extraordinary people so don't think about it too much."

When I finished, that girl seem to sink into even deeper thought... Even though I'd just told her not to think about it.

Heh! Heh! Heh!

But speaking of which, how is Yun Chang doing it so fast? Could it be that she has been taking it slow on purpose during our usual work?!

Ah, that's right. I still have my own work to finish!

"Now then, I'll be heading back to my field."

"Ah, let me come help."

"No, I'm fine." I turned and smiled, before I ran back to my plot of land.

Thereafter, I managed to struggle through and finish my work. Yet Yun Chang was able to complete ploughing a vast field in the time I took for just 10 odd meters.

"Yun Chang, is there some secret to ploughing?" I was tired to the point where I was soaked to the bone in sweat and just wanted to lay down there and then.

"Shouldn't be, at least none that I know of." Yun Chang replied nonchalantly as she wiped the sweat off her brow before turning to the girl. "That's right we're going to have lunch now, why don't you come along?"

"Un? Can I?" She looked at me, then at Yun Chang.

"Why not, come on."

And so, we invited her to eat with us.

“Aiyaya! I never thought you would be the Lord Liu Bei that everyone in the village has been singing praises of!”

Exactly what are the villagers saying about me huh~~

After lunch, everyone began chatting with the girl and only then did she realise who I was.

What followed was the inevitable questions about her household affairs which led to her recounting the sorrowful events.

“I see, so your father...” Yi De said.

“Un, it’s probably due to old age. He doesn’t get sick much usually.” She was talking about a sad topic though she didn’t seem very sad just looking at her face.

The girl was probably below 20 years of age and so her father was probably about 40 odd years of age. Looks like the life expectancy in this era isn’t very high at all.

“Is there no one else in your family?” Zhang Liao, who was sitting slightly in the back, asked.

“Un, mother died some time before.”

That is to say she now has no one she can count on.

“You may have that plot of land but you can’t work it yourself right.” Feng Xian said as she played with the Red Hare in her hands.

“Un.” The girl nodded with a helpless smile. “It’s true I can’t work it properly, but I plan on selling a portion of it soon.”

That was indeed a solution, since it was too much for her anyway.

“That was something your father left behind for you, to sell it just like that would be...” Yun Chang said with a difficult expression as she folded her arms.

“Un, it isn’t very good. But I have no other way.” She said with a helpless smile.

“Why you don’t find someone to marry.” Hua Tuo said somewhat jokingly. “This way, you have someone to help work your land and you can take care of each other.”

“That’s it!” Yi De suddenly yelled out. “Why didn’t I think of this, you are indeed of marriageable age as well.”

“Is, is that so...” She turned red on hearing this. “But I’ve never thought about such a thing.”

“Un, now is not too late to start.” Yun Chang said as she smiled. “If there is anyone you are interested in here, we can help you arrange something as long as you ask.”

We'll be here for a while after all.

Yun Chang seemed to be very interested in this topic, even though I've never seen them discuss such matters before.

"Interested person huh... I've never had someone like that."

The girl thought for a bit and gradually turned red... Un? Why does it feel like she is sneaking peeks at me?

"But..." The girl slowly continued.

"What is it? Thought of someone?" Yi De asked.

"I think this person is pretty good..." The girl was already scarlet red and pointed at the person she was interested in—

... Eh? Is the person in my direction?

I turned back and saw... Only the wall.

No one said a word in the building. But unlike the silence before I could feel a strange pressure emanating out from everyone that was aimed at me.

... Wait a second.

Could the person she is talking about be—

"Me?" I took a long while to think before I realised this and asked as I pointed to myself.

She only shyly nodded in reply.

"Th, this can't do!" Yi De spoke up before me and grabbed my arm, "Big brother is very busy, and does not have the time to think about such things!"

"*Ahem*, I'm sorry about this but big brother is the kind of man who will eventually go on to achieve great things and will not remain in this village." Yun Chang said with a serious tone. I looked over at her, and she seemed to be sweating quite a bit, more so than even when she was ploughing the fields.

"You have good taste, Xuan De is indeed a good man." Feng Xian said as she got up, "But now is too early for that, no?"

"Yo, you've only just met with us, won't you reconsider this?"

"Lord Hua Tuo, you're shaking me not that girl! This is the second time you're mistaking someone else for me already."

"Ah, sorry Lord Zhang Liao... Un? Are you crying over this matter with Lord Liu Bei?"

“Th, this is sweat!!”

Wh, what’s up with everyone? I haven’t even said anything in response, and yet why is everyone’s reaction even bigger than mine?

The girl seemed a bit shocked at the scene before her, but he recovered and slowly said, “... Umm, this is just my guess, but could it be that everyone likes—”

“No!!”

Everyone replied simultaneously, even though she hadn’t even completed her question.

“But it’s just as everyone has said,” I started speaking when I saw that no one else was going to say anything. “We’ve only known each other for half a day and don’t understand each other. Making a decision so easily isn’t too good...”

“Report~~~~”

Just then, a military courier came running in.

“What is—”

“Cao Cao has launched an offensive on Xu state. The Governor of Xu state, Tao Qian, has sought for aid from Lord Kong Rong who hopes for Lord Liu Bei to go on his behalf.”

I hadn’t even asked him ‘what is the matter’ and he already said it... Military couriers are getting way too impudent.

But, ‘hopes’... Is it?

I did say from the beginning that it would be a short stay but now it looks like it’s going to come true.

But why is Meng De launching an offensive on Xu state? Didn’t I save Cao Song?

Un... I don’t really know what Meng De is thinking right now.

“Un, I got it. Let Lord Kong Rong know that I accept his request and will be departing immediately.”

As I said so, the military courier left, and I turned to everyone, “Everyone please prepare to leave immediately. We’re heading to Xu state. It’s a good thing that it isn’t too far, let’s let the troops... Un?”

Everyone agreed to my words but they seemed to be concerned about something else. And that something else was the girl.

Ah that’s right, I nearly forgot.

Hu~

I exhaled to calm myself down.

“As you have seen and heard,” I said in a serious tone to the girl. “We have to leave shortly. While you’re alone here, please take care of yourself and when we have the chance we will come back to see you.”

Though I know we will probably never come back.

“And as for what you said before, as you can see I cannot give you a proper reply as I still have a lot of things to attend to.”

A lot of things indeed, some even involve space-time travel.

“... Un, I understand.” The girl sank into thought for a while before nodding obediently. She then replied with a look of resolve in her eyes, “I believe we will meet again.”

Un? She accepted it that quickly?

Though it’s a good thing, it does make one feel a bit sad.

So I thought, and tried to come up with a reply but found that I had nothing more to say.

“Well then, we will be making a move now.”

“Un.”

Even now as we are about to part, she is still wearing that radiant smile of hers. Only, I could catch a hint of sadness behind this smile. We had only known each other for a short time but now that we’re leaving, she will be left alone again.

As for the others, they seemed very relieved and went off to make their own preparations.

Seeing us leave, the girl also got up and made her way out.

“Ah, wait! What’s your name?” I suddenly remembered that I hadn’t even asked for her name. On hearing me, she turned and smiled as she said—

— My last name is Gan, Gan Qing.

(TL: Gan Qing, or Lady Gan as she is more commonly referred to, is Liu Bei’s first concubine. Liu Bei favoured her the most but never made her his main wife for fear of her being targeted.)

Chapter 4: Don't tell me this is my first refusal of Xu state

TL: Someone said cliffhanger? Stranger of Sword City will be out soon. Might disappear.

"Are you 3 here to receive us?"

It has been 2-3 days since we said our goodbyes to Gan Qing and left Qi commandery. Though we haven't seen Xu state city yet, our hosts have appeared before us.

On this point, Tao Qian was more considerate than Kong Rong.

"Yes, we are here to welcome Lord Liu Bei." The girl on the left said in a serious manner. "Ah, I am Sun Qian Sun Gong You."

"Cao Cao's army will be arriving soon, our lord is awaiting you in the city." The girl in the middle said something that was critical with a cheerful look. "I am Mi Zhu Mi Zi Zhong."

"That's how it is, we have been awaiting your arrival for a while now." The girl on the right had a look that said 'what a pain' all over her face and she saluted with her eyes half closed. "Ah, by the way I'm Jian Yong Jian Xian He."

(TL: Historically accurate, they all served Xu state's governor, though Jian Yong was supposed to be a childhood friend of Liu Bei.)

"Sun Qian, Mi Zhi and Jian Yong right?" I accepted the setting before me as I repeated their names.

Though their looks and personalities seemed to differ quite a bit from each other, their gestures, clothing and accessories were very similar.

"How far are we from Xu state city?" Feng Xian, who was holding the map, rode up and asked.

"Not far." "If we keep moving, we should reach by evening." "That's how it is, so get a move on."

To divide a single sentence amongst all 3 and say them in a way that makes it connect perfectly, what a high level of rapport amongst them... But isn't it bothersome to do so?

"In any case, we give thanks to Lord Tao Qian for sending us a welcome party," I bowed while on the horse, "Let us be on our way."

"Un, we'll guide you." 3 simultaneous voices.

As they said so, they turned their horses and began galloping while we followed.

"My lord I've wanted to ask this before." Zhang Liao said as she rode beside me. "Why is

Lord Kong Rong making us go? Our troops are few and he has not given us any.”

“Ah... Perhaps Lord Kong Rong feels that my relationship with Meng De is good and maybe I can convince her.”

“What? Wars are not games. Cases where mere words have stopped an army that has marched forth to its destination and is ready to strike are few and far.”

“Yes, that is correct Zhang Liao.”

In the first place, I don't think that my relationship with Meng De is exceptionally good. Neither do I believe that just having a good relationship can resolve conflicts peacefully.

But even so, I do want to speak with Meng De, and hear her reason for attacking Xu state.

If my memory is correct, then Cao Cao attacked Xu state in retaliation for Cao Song's death. But wasn't Cao Song alive now? What is the reason for attacking Xu state? Or should I say excuse?

In the short period that I have known Meng De, I feel that she isn't the maliciously cunning sort like in the original fiction or in history. Every word and every action is intended to bring about her ideal, and I have no basis for this, but I feel that Meng De's ideal does not consist of personal ambition.

As I thought so, I quickened the pace... Though because I wasn't a good rider, I couldn't get it much faster anyway.

Ughkuu!—

(TL: The kind of heavy cough that makes you want to vomit.)

Aiya! What the fuck!

We headed for Tao Qian's abode the moment we entered Xu state city and when we entered his room we were greeted with the grotesque sight of an old man who lay on a bed with blood spewing out of his mouth.

I, and everyone else, was utterly shocked.

“Th... This is...” I frantically backtracked and asked the 3 from Xu state who were calmly looking on from the side.

“That's right.” This is our lord, Lord Tao Qian.” “He is as you see he is.”

What do you mean he is as is...

I'd expected him to be in poor health but this was far beyond anything I had imagined.

“Quick, Hua Tuo. Have a look at him.”

“Oh!” Hua Tuo had been wearing a worried look all this while and was eager to try and treat Tao Qian.

Hua Tuo went up to measure his pulse and I went up with her as well. Tao Qian’s face had no luster at all, and it felt like he could die at any moment.

“Lord Tao Qian, are you alright.”

Though these words are useless, I still have to ask them in such circumstances.

“Ah... Lord Liu Bei is here... Don’t worry, I’m fine.”

Though those words were a lie, they still have to be said under such circumstances.

“Hua Tuo, how is it?”

“... No good.” Hua Tuo said as she shook her head. “Lord Tao Qian isn’t ill in particular, he is just far too weak from old age and the life in him is almost drained, that is to say—”

... That is to say, he is dying a natural death of which there is no cure huh...

“I know... What’s wrong with my body, *ughkuu*!—” Every cough sounded like he was about to vomit his lungs out, “... Lord Liu Bei, I have heard of your name and I have also heard that it was Lord Kong Rong who sent you here... With this, I can be at peace.”

“Un? At peace?”

Tao Qian gave a slight nod.

“This Xu state city... As well as Xiaopei and Xiapi and all my other territories... Shall henceforth be yours Lord Liu Bei. I will write a letter of appointment and submit it to the Imperial Court.”

“Ah?”

No way, it’s my first time meeting you yo~~~

“Lord Liu Bei, don’t decline this...” I’m not declining, I just don’t understand. “My end is nigh and Cao Cao has marched her troops to my borders, and Xu state now... Has no one to take care of it~~ *ke* *ke* *ke*”

Tao Qian was actually sighing but his body was so weak he could only cough.

I looked at him and saw that though his body was weak, his gaze was resolute. I knew that he wasn’t just fooling around and actually planned on giving his lands to me.

... Just a while back, I was still thinking that it might be time to get ourselves a base and now

Lord Tao Qian has sincerely offered his territories to me...

The most crucial of all was that he was unable to manage his territories at this time.

"In that case, I shall respectfully— Eh eh! Why are you pulling me!"

Before I could finish my words, I was hauled out of the building by Yun Chang and Zhang Liao.

"What are you doing?!" I lost my temper a little as I yelled and tidied my clothing that they pulled me by.

"Big brother (my lord) wouldn't be thinking of agreeing right?" 2 simultaneous voices.

"Yes I was, I think what Lord Tao Qian is saying makes sense."

I said resolutely, upon which they sighed.

"Big brother, you are too naive."

"My lord, Lord Tao Qian has yet to pass. If he gives away his official rank just like that, the commoners will start rumours about you~~"

"But Lord Tao Qian himself said that..."

"Big brother, you heard it and we did as well. But what about the others?" Yun Chang said. "If we mishandle this, things could easily go wrong~~"

... Now that they mention it, I think so too. Given that Tao Qian is still alive, having an outsider just barge in and take the spot of ruler would certainly start some unsavoury rumours.

(TL: Based harem.)

"... So I should decline first then?"

Nods.

Un, this is the only way. It's best not to be rash at this time.

And thereafter we re-entered the building and saw that everyone was waiting for my reply.

"Ah, Lord Tao Qian, I am here to aid you in your defense against Meng De, not to take your Xu state. Can we wait till after this conflict has concluded before we discuss that matter?"

"Not good." "My lord is already in such a state." "Don't torture the old man anymore,"

The 3 said upon hearing my reply.

"That cannot do," I said, more anxious than before. "Then do you 3 think that I am worthy

to take over Xu state?"

"Yes." "We've long heard tell of Lord Liu Bei's exploits." "What is there to be unworthy about."

... I shouldn't have asked them.

"Maa, if you really can't no matter what... Then we'll take it slow for now." Tao Qian didn't seem to want to press the matter. "But please remember Lord Liu Bei... That you now bear the responsibility... Of all the commoners of Xu state under your care and protection! *ke* *ke* *ke*~""

Another wave of coughing.

"Un, I understand." I bowed deeply in all seriousness and then asked in a helpless tone. "I would like to ask, what did you do to incur Meng De's wrath?"

"... Hai~ *ke* *ke* *ke*~~ Haiya~~~~" His coughing did not stop, but his sighs this time could not be stopped.

"I was a fool, and sent a newly surrendered Yellow Turban to guard her father. Who knew that such a thing would happen~~"

So in the end it's that huh.

But I still have to ask Meng De later about this.

"Hai~~~~ But now that things have come to this, I can only deal with it."

"Un... Please do." Tao Qian nodded, before continuing. "Sun Qian, Mi Zhu and Jian Yong... Lord Liu Bei should know these 3 by now... Don't think of them as 1 just because they are inseparable. Sun Qian is adept at dealing with internal affairs, Mi Zhu is good with finance and Jian Yong knows how to negotiate and debate. They each have their talents. I leave these 3 to Lord Liu Bei as well."

As he said so, the 3 bowed deeply towards me which I hurriedly ran up to stop.

"In this period of time, I will be working alongside you 3 and will be depending on you all for various things." I said as I bowed.

"We are unworthy of such words." 3 simultaneous voices.

Thereafter I got Hua Tuo to brew a concoction which would help boost vitality, in the hopes that it would make things easier for Tao Qian. Everyone did their introductions and then we left.

After we had settled our lodging arrangements, we met in the courtyard to discuss how we were going to deal with Meng De.

“As expected, talking our way out will be our main strategy.” I said first.

“Eh~~~ We aren’t fighting?”

“Lord Yi De, though fighting is exciting indeed, we shouldn’t fight, or kill, unnecessarily.” Feng Xian said as she quietly stroked the Red Hare.

“I agree with big brother. According to latest intelligence, Lord Cao Cao’s vanguard will arrive at this city by tomorrow while Lord Cao Cao herself is with the main body so we must get across to the vanguard general for this to work.” Yun Chang said as she supported her chin.

“Un,” I replied and got up. “In any case, we will be marching out tomorrow, and I will speak with the vanguard general.”

Everyone nodded. Since it was late and we hadn’t eaten, Yun Chang and the rest went to eat while Yi De and Hua Tuo went to bed early.

As for me, I was on Yi De’s team this time as I was fairly fatigued and needed to be at my fullest for the negotiation tomorrow.

The morning of the next day.

“Ah!!!~~~”

I was still sleepy when I woke up and found it strange that I couldn’t get up only to find that a girl lay on each side of me which utterly shocked me.

“What was this?! I may be a healthy young man but I’m not so debaucherous!

“Eh? Is– Isn’t this Gan...”

I looked closely at the girl on my right... Why is Gan Qing here?! And in my bed no less!

I frantically looked over to my left again... I really don’t know this one.

“Eh! Eh!” I slapped the girl’s face a couple of times before she slowly opened her eyes. “Why are you here? And who are you?”

“Oh, Lord Liu Bei, you’re awake!” The girl happily said so when she saw me. “You don’t know me yet right!”

Duh!!

“... And that’s why I’m asking, so who are you huh~~~” I rubbed my frowned eyebrows.

“I’m Mi Zhen, Mi Zhu’s little sister.”

(TL: Mi Zhen, or Lady Mi as she is called, is Liu Bei's second concubine.)

Is that so. She does indeed look like Mi Zhu, but smaller... Wait, now is not the time for this!!

“What I really want to ask is why are the 2 of you on my bed?”

Eh... It couldn't be right, that I have already, to the 2 of them—

“Big brother, what happened?!”

Just then, Yun Chang's voice and the footsteps of many others could be heard.

Though I don't have a sense of what was going on, nor have I figured out a proper explanation for all this, for now I would just like to say—

— I'm dead.

At my side, I could still hear the peaceful breathing of Gan Qing.

Chapter 5: Don't tell me this is the attack on Xu state

"Go on big brother, explain yourself."

"I—"

"Please lower your head Xuan De." *Wang*!

"Yes."

"Un, good, go ahead now my lord."

"I really don't know anything~~"

"Lies." Everyone said in one voice.

... Hai, looks like I'm done for this time.

Meng De's vanguard could be arriving anytime soon but yet here I was in the courtyard, being interrogated by everyone.

"Umm, can the 2 of you lend me a hand? Please tell them I didn't do anything... But I really didn't right?"

"Un?" Mi Zhen bent her head to the side... Can you stop acting cute and say it! "I was asleep so I don't know anything as well."

"I was talking about before you fell asleep!"

Damn it...

"Un?"

It's over, she completely doesn't get what I'm saying.

I looked over to Gan Qing who was sitting on the side in the hopes of her saying something helpful. She saw me look at her and nodded reassuringly.

"Actually, Lord Liu Bei really didn't do anything." Gan Qing said... But why do you have to blush while saying this! Who will believe you now!~~

"Hai~~~ So what exactly happened?" Yun Chang said helplessly. "I heard a commotion from big brother's room so I ran on over only to find Gan Qing there. And besides her, another one popped out of nowhere."

"..." "What do you mean out of nowhere? She's my little sister!" "..."

We only called for Mi Zhu but yet why did the other 2 came along?

"Little sister," Mi Zhu smiled as she went up to Mi Zhen, "Please tell me what happened or Lord Liu Bei will be finished."

I nodded vigorously.

"Maa, yesterday I happened to see someone enter the city when the city gates were closing so I went up to have a look out of curiosity and that is how I got to know big sister Gan." Mi Zhen said as she rubbed her head before beaming a smile at Gan Qing.

"So you followed us here?!" Zhang Liao exclaimed as she looked at Gan Qing helplessly.

"Un, because I want to observe Lord Liu Bei more."

... Un, now I understand the meaning behind those words she said when we parted. She probably planned on following us from the very beginning.

"And then? Why did you all come to my bed after that?" I quickly followed up on the main point.

"Big sister Gan asked if I knew Liu Bei and when I heard about this person from her I realised that he was the one who was speaking with Grandpa Tao just now. And since I knew where you were, I brought her along."

(TL: They aren't actually relatives, it's how they call old men they are close to affectionately. Like how they call Sun Jian "Uncle".)

How can someone be so casual...

"And then?"

"And then we came in."

"I am asking you why did you all fall asleep on my bed. By the way, by 'sleep', I mean sleeping and only sleeping."

"Isn't it obvious!" Mi Zhen exclaimed with an expression that seemed like I was the ignorant one, "It was already so late how could I have made lodging arrangements for her huh? Since we were in your room already, why not sleep there?"

"But you could have told me~~~"

"No, I didn't let her." Gan Qing said shyly. "I, I was afraid of interrupting Lord Liu Bei's precious sleep."

If you don't clarify things soon, I will enter an eternal sleep.

"Nothing else happened?" Yun Chang followed up with a frown and her face reddened as she asked this question.

"Un un, nothing." Mi Zhen shook her head vigorously while Gan Qing seemed to understand Yun Chang's implied meaning was and shook her head with a red face.

"... Hai~~~ On account of everyone's words," Yun Chang said and looked at everyone else for affirmation before continuing, "Big brother, you are hereby pronounced not guilty. That's good."

"Un, yes... Though Yun Chang's tone still scares me quite a bit." No matter what, I am truly relieved at this outcome.

"But little sister," Mi Zhu said to Mi Zhen, "Why did you sleep there as well? The guards were searching for you all night."

"Actually, on the way to Liu Bei's room last night, I heard some stories about him." What did Gan Qing say about me? "After I heard about him, I suddenly felt like this Liu Bei person was the one I've been looking for."

"Person you are looking for? What for?"

"My lifelong partner!"

(TL: She means marriage partner.)

"Eh?!~~~~~"

And as she said so, Mi Zhen gave an utterly enthralled look...

I'm not your prince charming yo~~~ Mi Zhu please talk some sense into your little sister.

"... Lord Liu Bei, since my little sister has said as much... Why not--"

"Eh?!~~~~~"

Mi Zhu actually seemed happy after hearing the nonsense her little sister just said.

As expected of people in the same family...

... Wu, it's that suffocating pressure again, I feel like I can't breathe... No, I must dispel their notions of marriage with me.

"Eh~~~ Umm, you're Mi Zhen right... I, umm, have no plans to get married as yet and more over I'm not very old. As for you... Ah, and you." I pointed at Gan Qing. "You all don't actually know me very well so I think you all should seriously reconsider this."

"... Wu."

Mi Zhen seemed a little defeated while Gan Qing was unperturbed.

"I understand that logic, which is why I'm here." Gan Qing said as she patted her chest which

was neither big nor small, "I'm here to ascertain Lord Liu Bei's person."

"Wu..." This counterattack was rather effective and left me speechless.

"Oh~~ Though I don't know what is happening but it seems like if I follow big sister Gan, I can be with Liu Bei."

"Were those words I told you before useless!"

But really, will I be forced to marry here? 2 of the Ladies are already here... But why do I feel like if I do so, I'll lose something important?

(TL: The concubines of Liu Bei are typically referred to as Lady [last name].)

(TL: It's your galgame self giving you advice! Advance down a single route too fast and you miss out on the harem route! Though the main is already a sort of harem anyway...)

"In, in any case," Just then Yun Chang walked over with an expression that seemed to be brimming with anger and yet seemed terribly troubled at the same time, "We don't mean anything by this, it's just that as fellow girls, we should... That is..."

What's the matter? Yun Chang rarely stammers like that.

"You mean to have a fair competition?" Gan Qing seemed to get it though, and something I did not understand.

"Un, though I didn't mean that, but let's do it like that then." Yun Chang nodded as she flinched about while the rest nodded with troubled expressions as well.

(TL: In case you're wondering, there are other young male characters as well though admittedly few, and not every girl joins the harem.)

"I understand." Gan Qing nodded as well. "Well then, I won't press the matter of marriage, and will wait for Lord Liu Bei to come around with a reply."

"Ah? ... Oh." I was stunned momentarily as I was still trying to make sense of what was going on.

Eh? The problem is resolved after some mysterious words between the women?

"Hai~~~" Yun Chang sighed, "Maa, because it's big brother, this can't be helped."

After Yun Chang said so, everyone there gave helpless smiles in reply.

What is it about me that cannot be helped?!

The drama with Gan Qing and Mi Zhen went on throughout the morning and only concluded when the Cao Army had advanced close enough that their flags could be seen from to the city.

When we heard that Cao Cao's flags were sighted we rushed to the city gates and found that Sun Qian and Jian Yong had already assembled the troops... No wonder I didn't see them halfway through just now.

"Are we ready?" I turned and asked the girls as I mounted my horse, though I already knew the answer.

"Everyone is armed and ready." Yun Chang replied.

"Un, we can begin." Feng Xian said as she looked at the troops behind.

Nothing more to say then, let's go.

"Alright, march out!"

As I gave the orders, a soldier at the side gestured to the guards at the top of the city gates. After a moment, the gates began to open.

!!!

As the gate gradually opened, my jaw dropped in tandem with my expanding field of vision.

— As far as the eye could see, Cao Army troops everywhere.

"Hou~~~ This formation." The first to speak was Zhang Liao who gave a sigh of admiration.

"... Our troops are about 10,000 strong while the Cao Army is said to have 10x our numbers." "Just by extrapolating from the size of the vanguard, along with previous information, it appears that Cao Cao really has sent out 100,000 troops." "That's how is, we can't win in a straight up fight so we must be careful in how we proceed."

Un, it's exactly as the 3 girls said.

I rode out with my troops slowly as we went into our formation.

After we were all in place, it's time to begin communications..

"Where is Cao Cao?!~~~~" I bade my horse to take one set forward as I yelled out at the top of my voice. "If she is in the main body, please wait for her arrival. I, Liu Xuan De, have words for her!~~~~"

After I yelled out, the other side didn't reply. Only after a long while did a general run out with a broadsword in hand up the middle of the distance between the 2 armies and yelled out to our side—

"My lord is rushing here in the main body, but if you want to meet her, you must last till then. Send someone out to duel me now!"

... Must we fight first anyway!?

Looking from here, this general was clearly a young girl, but this figure is...

"Damn it!! Why does someone who is about the same height as me have such big ones!" Yi De spat out angrily as she gestured in front of her breasts to compare their sizes.

This really is my first time seeing one... So that's how an oppai loli looks like...

Ah, now is not the time to think about this, I better explain things clearly.

"No, we came out for the sake of speaking with your lord..."

"My name is Xu Chu Xu Zhong Kang!! Send your finest generals out for a duel at once!!"

"Not listening at all huh..."

But to think she is actually Xu Chu, this feels really weird.

But what do we do now? If we keep at it, the other side might just decide to charge at us...

"Xuan De, no need for further talk, it's time we tried something else."

"Un? Feng Xian?"

Just as I was being troubled by this, Feng Xian had rode up out of the formation.

"Xuan De is always singing praises of my fighting skills yet I don't seem to recall ever having shown them to you." Feng Xian dismounted and extracted Red Hare from inside her armour and placed it on the ground as she said so... But why are you bringing it around even at this time. "We happened to commence our fair competition today so Xuan De, please watch me."

"Ah, oh." I don't know what she is competing in but at this time I should just cheer her on first, "But please be careful Feng Xian."

Feng Xian only smiled in reply, and mounted her horse again and charged forth.

When Xu Chu saw Feng Xian charging over, she too met Feng Xian with her own charge.

"Yaa~~~"

"Ha!"

The halberd and broadsword drew sharp lines in the air from their paths and sparks flew from where they clashed.

"That one called Xu Chu has a lot of strength." After just a few moves, Yun Chang began saying in a serious tone. "Feng Xian has been suppressed by the difference in power for a while now."

Is that so? I can't tell at all~~~ But that doesn't sound good at all—

“Yaa!!!~~~” Just then Feng Xian gave a loud roar and slashed down with her halberd.

Though I was quite a distance away, this roar was so loud I felt like my eardrums had burst.

“Wu... Kuh!” Though Xu Chu managed to block that blow, her movements seemed to have slowed for some reason.

“As expected of Feng Xian!” Yi De exclaimed excitedly.

“What happened?”

“Did my lord (Xuan De) not see it? The enemy is now fearful!” Zhang Liao nodded as she said so. “As expected, my lord's (Feng Xian) aura is strong.”

“Aura?”

“When we were fighting the Yellow Turbans I'd mentioned it before.” Yun Chang added. “Most people don't know martial arts and in times like this, bravery is used to overcome this. I'd already keenly felt Feng Xian's bravery when we first met. Even if me and little sister were to face her together, we would only draw at best. Before I had said the other side had greater strength, but in terms of bravery, Feng Xian is way ahead.”

This really is...

I looked back at Feng Xian as a newfound admiration towards her budded inside me.

“Yaa!” Another heavy blow.

“Kuh!”

When Xu Chu took this blow, her whole body was blown back.

“The other side has lost their stance! A good chance! ... Un? Why is my lord not attacking?”

Feng Xian did not swing down her halberd as she paused and waited for Xu Chu to regain her balance.

If I can avoid killing, I won't... Is it?

Just then, several shouts could be heard from the enemy side and 5 generals could be seen charging at Feng Xian.

In just the blink of an eye, Feng Xian was surrounded by 6 enemies.

“Don't they know the rules of duels?!” Yun Chang was enraged and made to charge over as well. “Yi De, let's go.”

“Lord Yun Chang and Lord Yi De, you all need not worry. My lord can handle it.” Zhang Liao grabbed onto Yun Chang’s shoulder who was about to fly out.

“But 1 on 6 is...” Yun Chang did not finish her sentence because she caught sight of Feng Xian who easily dealt with attacks from all directions with ease, and was even looking for a gap in their attacks to deliver a counterattack.

“Awesome~~~”

Indeed, even as a young girl, Feng Xian is the strongest warrior in the Three Kingdoms era.

But now wasn’t the time to be impressed. I have to think of a way to get them to stop...

“Stop! All of you!” A familiar voice came from the enemy’s side and thereafter, the drummers changed their tune to one of retreat.

(TL: Drums were important in relaying military commands in ancient China. If you ever watched Red Cliff, you will see how drums are relied on to execute even complex formation change commands.)

And so the enemy generals that had come out stopped their attack... And returned obediently.

I looked over to where the voice came from, and indeed it was Meng De as expected.

“Good job, Feng Xian.”

“Oh!” Feng Xian high-fived Zhang Liao. Even after such an intense battle, not a bead of sweat could be seen on her face.

“My lord is impressive as expected.” Zhang Liao saluted Feng Xian.

“No, if we were to fight for another 15 minutes, I would probably start having difficulties.”

(TL: She actually says 一刻钟 which is an ancient measure of time that equates to about 14.4 minutes in ancient times but was amended to be 15 minutes when China adopted Western conventions of time in the modern era.)

That’s more than impressive enough.

“Xuan De, wh, what do yo-you th-think about it?” Feng Xian said as she walked up to my side. “Maa, perhaps someone like me can no longer be considered a girl huh~~”

“No, I think that you look enchanting in battle. And also quite... Ah, cute I guess.”

Her moves were all smooth, natural and seemingly relaxed. Though there was power behind her blows, they did not seem oppressive.

“Wu! ...” Feng Xian suddenly turned into a shy and demure girl and turned her head away.

“Cu, cute...”

(TL: Ore no Shogun ga Konna ni Kawaii Wake ga Nai)

“My lord (Feng Xian)...” Zhang Liao gave a helpless smile as she looked at Feng Xian from the side before turning to me. “Though it seems they have retreated, my lord (Liu Bei), you have yet to speak with Meng De.”

“If Meng De has pulled back her troops, then that means she understands what I want—”

“Report!~~~~~” A military courier came running from the other side until he reached me and bowed. “Imperial Chancellor Cao wishes to invite you for a discussion.”

As I thought.

“Un, I got it.” I finally felt like I was making some progress to solving this conundrum when I heard the military courier’s words.

But now was not yet the time for feeling relieved for the discussion later would decide everything.

Chapter 6: Don't tell me this is the negotiation

"First things first, let me thank you from the bottom of my heart, for saving my father." The moment I entered the tent, I was greeted with the sight of Meng De flicking her long hair as she came up to welcome me.

Meng De was still the same as always, with that signature confident smile on her face.

"Ah, it's nothing much. I just happened to see him and trouble and so I saved him." I said as I walked towards her. "But did your father safely reach Chang'an?"

"He reached quite a while back, and when he saw me, the first thing he talked about was not about the robbery, but you." Meng De said meaningfully. 'Looks like my father has taken quite a liking to you.'

"He thinks too highly of me."

But at least I can be relieved about the matter of Cao Song, though this begs the question of why would Meng De still...

"Please sit, Xuan De." Meng De gestured for us to take a seat, and continued. "We haven't met for about a month now."

"That's right. Back then, you said you were going to get back Chang'an and the Son of Heaven before you left Luoyang. Not even a month passed before you accomplished what you said you would." I sat down as I said so, and gestured for the rest to do so as well.

"Yes, now the new capital has been set to be Xuchang where the Son of Heaven will lead the Imperial Court once more." Meng De said as she ordered her subordinates to bring drinks over. "But the world is still far too chaotic and just the words of the Son of Heaven is not enough to stand down and recognise his authority."

"... Meng De really has a lot to do huh."

Wine was brought while I said so.

"... Before long, I should be formally appointed as Imperial Chancellor." Meng De said as she circled the rim of the cup with her index finger. "When that time comes, all feudal lords nationwide will probably say that I am controlling the Son of Heaven."

That will definitely come to pass.

"That isn't something good to wear..."

"I understand, there will be many who will gather under the banner of ridding the Han traitor and come for my head. Just like when we gathered to destroy Dong Zhuo." Meng De brought the wine cup close. "Or perhaps, people have already done so."

When I heard this, my palms began sweating.

“Would Meng De be referring to her father being robbed?”

“Un, to put it simply, yes.”

Meng De’s laugh hadn’t diminished in the least, but I could no longer detect a shred of goodwill behind it.

“Is that the reason why you have come to conquer Xu state?”

“Un, to put it simply, yes.” Meng De continued to smile as she closed her eyes.

“But isn’t your father alright? Moreover, Lord Tao Qian did not mean to—”

“Are you certain?” Meng De suddenly opened her eyes and looked straight into mine.

“Eh?”

“From what I know, though the Governor of Xu state is very old, he is still very good in his judgement of people.” Meng De began to speak in a serious tone as she held her chin. “A person who knows how to judge others would actually place a man who might succumb to greed in charge of protecting my father... Is this not a ploy of sorts?”

I looked back to the Xu state 3, but the look on their faces told me they had never considered this possibility.

(TL: Throughout the novel, the 3 girls are referred to as a collective several times. In such cases, they will be called the “Xu state 3”.)

“To be honest, I have nothing to hide.” Meng De continued. “Though my father is alive and well, I am truly enraged about this whole affair. And so I have decided to let this rage out on Xu state.”

Meng De said resolutely, and emptied the contents of the wine cup into her.

“... Meng De,” I said as I looked at my own cup, any desire to drink long gone. “As the reinforcements from Beihai, I cannot let you all take Xu state.”

“Cannot, or do not want to?” Meng De asked probingly. “As an outsider, what could possibly compel you to fight this much for Xu state?”

... In this situation, I better not mention the matter of Tao Qian giving me Xu state.

“Lord Cao Cao.” “Lord Liu Bei is now the Governor-in-lieu of Xu state.” “That’s how it is.”

“Hou~~~” Meng De’s face had ‘no wonder’ written all over it.

“Ah! Not yet!” I hurriedly retorted them.

... Why did these 3 have to say it.

"In any case, even if you are the Governor of Xu state now, when the time comes, I'll still come for Xu state." Meng De returned to her confident smile from the start.

"I understand... But please I beseech you, for the sake of the commoners of Xu state, please don't wage a war." I lowered my head as I said so.

"..." Meng De did not reply to this.

Un, this should be impossible now. And now even I don't know whether Lord Tao Qian was just being senile or if he intended to kill Cao Song.

"I will think about it over again. Sieging a city will bring us no small loss given that you are around." Meng De said, seeming to have come around and gave some way. "Alright, the tasteless affairs are now concluded. Let us have a more relaxing chat now."

"Un, alright." I took down my negotiating countenance. I wasn't satisfied with this outcome, as it couldn't be considered favourable. "But why did Meng De insist on me bringing Feng Xian over as well?"

"Nothing much. I just wanted to see who it was who could match 6 of my finest generals... Hou hou~~~~~" Meng De sized up Feng Xian who was standing behind me. "I must say... This dog is quite cute huh."

That's all you have to say? And it's not even about Feng Xian.

"Right!" On hearing her mention the dog, Feng Xian seemed to have become a different person entirely and began to excitedly introduce Meng De to it.

Seeing them happily play with the dog, I turned to speak with the Xu state 3.

(Why did you all have to mention to Meng De about the matter of giving Xu state to me?)

(It's nothing much.) (Since Lord Cao Cao has said as much, she probably already knows this matter.) (Instead of hiding this, it's better to speak the truth at this time.)

(But this hasn't been decided yet right...)

(We decided it for you.)

3 people with different expressions and tones said the exact same words.

(But no matter what you all say, as long as I don't receive the official seal, you all can't do anything to me.)

(Tch.)

(Can you 3 don't click your tongues at me at the same time?)

Having Xu state city was a good thing, but now it was a burden.

(Lord Xuan De! Lord Xuan De!)

(Ah? Ah! Hua Tuo, you're here.)

(Lord Xuan De is too much, I've always been around~~~)

Un? But why has Hua Tuo followed along as well?

(Please help me tell Lord Cao Cao that I have something to report, it's urgent!)

What could it be? But seeing the serious look on Hua Tuo, it probably concerns life and death.

"Meng De! ... Umm, please put down the dog first, I have something to talk to you about."

"Un? What is it huh?" Meng De replied me half-heartedly.

I gestured to Hua Tuo with my chin to get her to speak. Hua Tuo nervously took a step forward and bowed before she began speaking.

"Ju-just now when the 7 generals were in their duel, though I can't see too clearly, something did catch my attention." Hua Tuo said and took a step back. "From looking at their movements, there is 1 amongst your 6 who has a severe condition in their eyes. If we do not remove the problematic eyeball in time, she could lose both eyes."

(You can tell even that?) I whispered to Hua Tuo.

(Leaving aside everything else, even though that person is clearly right-handed, she always slashed from her left, wouldn't that mean that her right eye has issues?)

I didn't think that Hua Tuo could catch such details even with her horrid short-sightedness.

"Un, this is a serious matter indeed. You, go and bring Dian Wei, Xu Chu, the Xiahou sisters, Yue Jin and Li Dian here." Meng De ordered her subordinate with a serious tone, before turning to Hua Tuo. "In a while when they have arrived, please confirm who it is you were talking about and then please proceed with treatment."

"Yes." Hua Tuo bowed with relief when she heard so.

Feels like all of them are important named generals...

And are all 6 of them female?

(TL: Were you just looking at Feng Xian?)

"Xiao E! It's her, she was so strong from the very beginning when we fought each other one on one.~~~" Xu Chu exclaimed as she pointed at Feng Xian. And the one she was speaking to

was... Xiao E? Is it E Lai? Then the girl by her side is Dian Wei?

(TL: Dian Wei's courtesy name is E Lai (Pronounced as "er" but without the r sound). But Xu Chu calls her xiao E, or little E. I'm leaving this as the former because the latter just sounds retarded, especially when the person in question might not even be little. If the person's name contains a Chinese character with the pinyin of "xiao" I will write it in uppercase (Xiao) but if it's a means of addressing the person, it will be in lowercase (xiao) unless it's the beginning of a sentence.)

"That's right. Just from the several blows I exchanged with her, facing off against her felt like being a cake that was about to be smashed by a morningstar."

What sort of analogy is that!!

"Ah, the 2 of you are pretty good yourselves, and have great strength. The only thing you both lack would be balance." Feng Xian said humbly on hearing their judgement of herself.

"Un, but this really can't be helped, see." As she said so, Dian Wei pushed up her huge breasts with a helpless smile, and I understood instantly.

I looked at Dian Wei, who was just barely taller than Xu Chu, with a short fringe while most of her hair was combed back and tied in a small ponytail... And was another oppai loli like Xu Chu. If Yi De saw her, she would probably get mad again.

"I give her skills 100 marks. What about you, Yue Jin?"

"Li Dian, if it were me, I'd say she gets 99. More or less perfect, but still not quite there yet."

"What's with giving marks..." Feng Xian did not know how to reply to that, nor did she quite understand what they meant. But not understanding this sort of thing is fine.

But now that they addressed each other, I know they are Li Dian and Yue Jin.

Both were tall, wore a serious look, had their arms folded across their chests, and each wore a hat. Yue Jin tied her hair in a braid while Li Dian's fringe covered one eye.

"It's her!" Hua Tuo, who had been walking around amongst them, suddenly shouted while pointing at a girl. "Seeing it up close makes me certain that we must extract it as soon as possible."

"Oh~~~ Big sister, you won a prize!" A girl who looked like the one Hua Tuo was pointing to said enthusiastically.

"Eh?! Extract!!" The girl was shocked and seemed to know that her eye had issues and promptly turned her face away. "My, my eye is fine."

"Yuan Rang, you must be obedient and accept treatment~~~" Meng De said calmly as she sat by the side.

Then that means this is Xiahou Dun. She is quite a bit taller than me with long black hair that was messy and unkempt, and wore a stern and serious look.

(TL: In the original, Xiahou Dun lost his left eye from a stray arrow after a duel with Lu Bu.)

“Meng De! It’s not as if you don’t know I’m afraid of pain!” Yes, that stern looking girl started whining after hearing that she had to receive treatment. “If it wasn’t because of my fear of pain from injuries, I wouldn’t have bothered training my martial skills to such a high level.”

What kind of logic is that huh.

“If you don’t extract this eye, you will lose both eyes.” Hua Tuo said with emphasis on the latter half. “I have ‘mafeisan’ here, it won’t hurt.”

“No, I won’t do it!” Xiahou Dun shook her head vigorously and would have looked just like a spoiled kid if she was about to roll on the ground. “Even if it doesn’t hurt, when I open my eyes, I’ll lose half of my vision, who can beat that huh!”

“Yuan Rang, why are you acting like a ki? ... Eh! Eh! Eh! Miao Cai, stop making fun of your big sister and hold her down!” Meng De felt like she couldn’t get through to her and ordered Xiahou Yuan to catch her.

Xiahou Yuan and Xiahou Dun looked very similar, albeit Xiahou Yuan’s straighter hair and a more playful personality.

“Big sister, it will be alright.” Xiahou Yuan said as she approached Xiahou Dun.

“Miao Cai, there’s fried chicken there!”

“Where?” Xiahou Yuan gullibly looked over.

“An opening!” Xiahou Dun seized the moment when her little sister was distracted and dashed out of the tent.

“Damn! Everyone else, get her now!” Meng De seemed to have not expected her plan to fail and tapped her head as she said so. “No matter what we must find her and bring her here. I will not let her lose both eyes for the sake of keeping one.”

All of us ran out, only to see Xiahou Dun standing about 100 meters away from us.

“Nobody come close! You should know that no one can catch up to me on foot!”

Looks like she is still open to discussion.

“Come back, big sister. It’s only one eye. No need to be so afraid!”

“My dear little sister, if you have nothing good to say, then don’t say anything! The one who is losing an eye is me, not you!”

Now that I think about it, it is quite a momentuous operation and she hasn't had any time to prepare herself at all.

"Well then General Xiahou, why don't we take it easy for now? And proceed with treatment when you're mentally ready?" I suggested.

"..." Xiahou Dun thought it over and probably felt like the stand-off was not going to end in a favourable outcome for her anyway and decided to accept my suggestion. "Then, let's go with—"

Whoosh— The sound of something piercing through the air came from beside my ear.

"Ah!!!!" Xiahou Dun immediately screamed and held her face as she sank to the ground.

Taking a closer look, I saw that Xiahou Dun had been shot by an arrow.

"Big sister?!" "Yuan Rang!" "General Xiahou!"

Meng De and her other subordinate generals were visibly shocked and bewildered by what happened.

"Please don't be alarmed everyone." Just then, Feng Xian who was holding a bow from behind us said calmly. "Don't worry, what I shot was her bad eye, and so we need not bother wrangling with her... Un? Why does everyone look like they want to laugh and cry at the same time?"

You really are efficient huh...

"Ah!!~~~~~" Xiahou Dun who lay on the ground suddenly cried out from the pain.

"Oh right! There was that!" Xiahou Yuan said as she snapped her fingers as though she had realised something. "Meng De, I'll add another arrow now. Not to worry, my archery is top notch."

"Someone else has already shot her, how many arrows do you want to put in her huh~~~~" Meng De said as she sighed.

"Ah!!~~~ It hurts so bad!! Ow!~~~" Still screaming.

"Aiya, not only do you have stellar martial skills, your archery is on point too!"

"I am unworthy of such praise. I only dabbled a little in archery in my childhood."

"Oh? Please do share with us your experiences. It may help us improve our archery." As they said so, the 5 Cao Army generals gathered over at Feng Xian to hear about her experiences.

"Ah~~~~~ My eye!! My eye!!" Still screaming.

"Cut it out you lot... Quickly haul her into the tent, all the soldiers are watching." Meng De said calmly as she gave a helpless smile.

"I hope that Yuan Rang is fine after this. Lord Hua Tuo, please take a look at Yuan Rang to see if there are any other injuries. If not, please proceed with treatment for the eye.. Ah, don't forget to use that 'mafeisan' of yours."

By the way, Xiahou Dun was still screaming and moaning all this while.

"90."

"I say 85."

Why are you giving marks at this time...

In the end, I and the Xu state 3 were the ones to carry Xiahou Dun into the tent.

"Ah~ My eye~" Half a day has gone by and the surgery has concluded with the eye cleanly removed. Xiahou Dun was now lying on the bed and uttering the same lines as before with glazed over eyes.

"Maa, don't be too sad big sister. It can still grow back in future. Come, I'll give you an eyepatch."

"Who do you think you're kidding!! Since when do eyes grow back huh?!"

Xiahou Yuan, that's not how you comfort someone...

"Xuan De, thank you for today." Meng De said with a smile as she shifted her gaze from Yuan Rang to me, "If it weren't for you and Lord Hua Tuo, I could have lost one of my best generals."

"It's nothing much."

"Saving the dying and curing the sick is my rightful duty. Ah, by the way, General Xiahou better not move around too much in this period in case the wound ruptures."

"Though it will be a bit difficult, I got it." Meng De said as she looked at the energetic Xiahou Dun helplessly. "It's not getting any early, you all should return soon."

"Alright," I nodded, and began to broach the original topic, "Ah, about the matter of Xu state..."

With our strength now, there is no way we can face Meng De's troops. If Meng De begins her offensive tomorrow, then the city will fall tomorrow. If Meng De begins her offensive the day after, then the city will fall the day after.

"Un, I understand." Meng De said after closing her eyes in thought for a while before facing

me with a frown. "But no matter what happens, I have no intention of retreating."

"..."

You still plan on advancing then...

"Seeing how you look now, you probably don't get it." Meng De continued with a smile. "Let me say it once more. No matter what happens, I have no intention of retreating."

Un... So what is it with that line?

Just then the Xu state 3 behind me pulled on my shirt.

(It means that the negotiation was a success.) (Not retreating doesn't equate to advancing.) (That is to say Lord Cao Cao has changed her plans and is now using her supposed offensive on Xu state as a guise to see what the other feudal lords will do in response, before making her next move.)

The 3 behind me explained in excited whispers.

Oh! So that's what it's about~~~~~

"Ah ah, in that case, thank you from the bottom of my heart, Meng De."

"No need for thanks. I just feel that doing things this way is more aligned to my goals. And besides, I get to make you owe me a favour." Meng De said with a smile.

(TL: She can't just retreat either. If she does so, then her standing in the Imperial Court will plummet and the other feudal lords will make light of her.)

Even though we'd gotten nowhere at all earlier, in just a short while after all that fuss with Xiahou Dun, we made significant progress...

Alright, this should be good enough for now.

"We'll be leaving then."

I said, and led the others to exit the tent. Just before I left, I turned and saluted Meng De and her generals.

"Un, go on. In this period, if there's anything, just come and find me. If I have anything, I'll find you as well." Meng De said as she raised a hand she folded across the chest and waved at me. "Maybe I'll bring my troops along as well."

Wu!

"... Haha, just kidding. Don't need to look so fearful."

(TL: Just like a guy teasing the girl he likes.)

I only hope it really is just a joke.

As I thought so, I returned her smile with a helpless one, and led the Xu state 3 and Hua Tuo out of the tent.

As I was exiting the tent, I could still hear the voices from inside.

“Miao Cai, get a cup of water for your big sister.”

“Oh, just so happens there’s one bowl of water on the table here. Here, big sister.”

“Un... What water is this? Why is there white fungus inside?”

(TL: White fungus has many names, you can Google it. Basically, it’s one of those ingredients in traditional Chinese medicine and food as well.)

Well, Xiahou Dun does need to eat and rest well after all.

“A-re? I seem to have left General Xiahou Dun’s eyeball behind... I wanted to bring it back for my medical research too.” Hua Tuo said sadly as we walked on.

Left behind? ... Could it be!!

“... Hua Tuo, about the eyeball, where did you leave it?”

“I left in a small bowl of water on a table in the tent.”

A single line of sweat streamed down my head on hearing Hua Tuo’s reply.

(TL: In the original fiction, Xiahou Dun pulled out the arrow and ate his eyeball.)

Chapter 7: Don't tell me this is the nightmare I have to face after returning to Xu state

"That... That is to say the Cao Army is... St, staying put for now then?"

After we returned to the city, I bade Feng Xian and Hua Tuo to rest first while I and the Xu state 3 went to Tao Qian to report the results of our negotiations. And at this time, Tao Qian's breathing was even weaker than before.

"A tenuous deadlock." "This time when we went to the Cao Army camp, I got a rough gauge of her supplies and by my estimations they should be able to hold out for a month at most." "When that time comes, we feel that Cao Cao will direct her attention to a new target, but we cannot eliminate the possibility that she will just launch an offensive on this city."

Their analysis is detailed and correct. To put it simply, the threat is still there, though we need not worry as much as before.

After Tao Qian heard it, he lay quietly in bed, deep in thought.

"Has the blockade... Been lifted?"

...

The 3 wordlessly nodded.

"Ah..."

Tao Qian slowly shut his eyes and gave a long exhalation.

"My lord." The 3 called out to Tao Qian who had shut his eyes and leaned forward with sorrowful looks. Even the usually expressionless Gong You frowned deeply at this moment.

Eh? Is, is he.... Gone? Just like that?

... Ah, life truly is fragile.

Though I'd only met Tao Qian a few times and don't really know him, I could feel that he is a man of upright character from the few words I've exchanged with him and from what I've heard of him. Though he had made a mistake in his choice of bodyguard for Cao Song, now that he is dead, I have nothing more to say...

"Hu~~~"

"He's only sleeping!!"

This Tao Qian, how can he play with my feelings like that.

"... Don't be noisy." "... Lord Liu Bei, let's go out first." "... That's how it is."

It wasn't just me, those 3 were tricked too, and they frowned at the old man.

"Alright, I'll go and have a good rest too."

When I walked out of his quarters, it was already dark out.

These days have really been passing by quick huh~ It was only noon when we left the city and now it's night already.

I sighed as I looked at the skies,

Thinking back, where could my route home be? Up till now, there hasn't even been a single clue. A single feather fan and a piece of paper, where am I being led to?

Gu~

... Ah, looks like my biggest worry now shouldn't be this, but food.

I hadn't eaten lunch after all, and if I don't eat soon, it will be the morning of the next day.

What the heck is this situation huh?

The moment I entered the courtyard, the sight of a plethora of dishes laid out on the stone table greeted me. Yun Chang and Gan Qing rushed over when they saw me, and pushed and pulled me to the stone table and bade me to sit.

"Come, big brother have a bite."

"No, Lord Liu Bei should eat mine first."

But why is it just the 2 of them here? Did the rest all go to sleep this early already?

"You 2 haven't gone to bed huh." I withdrew my hands into my sleeves as it was a little chilly and lowered my head to look at the dishes. "Un... Did you 2 make these together?"

"No, the left side is mine."

"The right side is mine."

Indeed, now that I look closely, the plates they use differ quite bit.

Un?

Is it just a misconception of mine? Why do I smell a faint smell of gunpowder between the 2 of them... Did they let the fire burn a little too much while they were cooking?

"Haa... But what's up? Cooking today all of a sudden."

I could probably understand why Gan Qing did it, but this was unusual for Yun Chang.

The ones who cooked were usually Zhang Liao and Hua Tuo. Occasionally, I would also chip in and cook.

“Maa, I thought that big brother may not have eaten yet and it wouldn’t be nice to trouble the cook at this time so I did it myself.”

“Come come, leave the words for later and try it first Lord Liu Bei.”

“Un, I am indeed hungry.” I picked up the chopsticks as I said so.

At the very moment when I picked up the chopsticks, I could feel 2 glances focus keenly on me.

I could tell they were anticipating my first pick very much.

I couldn’t help but get nervous.

“Th, then I’ll try Yun Chang’s first...”

“Yes!”

“Eh~~~”

“Un? What’s up you 2?” I looked at them, not understanding what just transpired between the 2.

“No, it’s nothing. Go on, big brother.”

Gan Qing only shook her head wordlessly in response,

Un... So strange~~~ I keep getting the feeling like they are competing about something. But the order doesn’t matter right?

“Oh,” I nodded as I picked up a piece of vegetable, and couldn’t help but get happy as I thought about it. “It’s been a while since we’ve been together but this is the first time I’m eating something that Yun Chang made huh~~

As I said so, I made to dig in—

“That’s right, this is my first time cooking too.” Yun Chang said with a refreshing smile.

Eh?

My arm that held the chopsticks stopped in midair and the tongue which I had stuck out hurriedly retreated back.

First time... I’m getting an ominous feeling.

“Un? Big brother, what’s wrong?” Yun Chang asked when she saw that I had stopped my

chopsticks.

“Ah? No, nothing.” But my subconscious told me that I absolutely must eat this bite.

I opened my mouth wide, and forced myself to place the piece of vegetable into myself..

— Wu!

What is this feeling? ... I clearly ate something that appeared to be stir-fried vegetables, but why does it feel slippery and sticky? It felt like I ate something like mud... What was this vegetable?

... I have to say, Yun Chang, you have zero talent at cooking huh~~~

“Big brother? You don’t look too good.”

“Ho, how can that be?” Good thing it was dark out, and Yun Chang can’t see how sickly pale my face currently is.

“Then—” Yun Chang said shyly, a rare sight, and blinked as she gazed between me and the plate of mysterious substance X. Seems like she is awaiting for my judgement.

“... De, delicious.” I said, trying not to look into Yun Chang’s eyes as I did so.

“Is, is that so... It’s good as long as you’re satisfied.” Yun Chang raised her hand and scratched her head as she turned her face away embarrassedly.

... I feel like I told a terrible lie, but... But it’s much better than making Yun Chang sad.

“My turn!” Gan Qing said impatiently.

“Ah, okay. Then let me try some of Miss Gan’s...”

(TL: He calls her 甘姑娘, which roughly translates to Miss Gan given the context.)

As I said so, I reached out with my chopsticks.

Ah... Because of Yun Chang’s food, my hands began to tremble pathetically.

“Un, please do.” Gan Qing said as she looked at my chopsticks with utmost anticipation.

“Sp, speaking which, this is the first time, I’m eating something you made huh.” My trembling chopsticks finally got hold of a piece of meat.

“Un, to tell you the truth, this is my time cooking too.” Gan Qing said as she shyly lowered her head.

Eh?

Eh?!

The arm which held my chopsticks stopped yet again. But because of my trembling, it didn't really come to a complete stop.

"Ho, how could this be... Your first time cooking?!" I looked at Gan Qing in disbelief.

"Maa, it's a little embarrassing to be honest. My father has always been afraid of me being burnt or getting sooty so he always did the cooking."

Un, I should have known looking at that smooth white skin of yours...

(TL: Nah, natural SKII cream. Don't they make that stuff from rice or something?)

Alright, get it together me. At this stage, I can only hope that Gan Qing has some talent in cooking.

I gulped before I placed the meat-like object into my mouth.

Ahen...

—*Ou*~~

I held back an intense wave of nausea.

This... This... I actually put this thing in my mouth!

This taste, uwaa... It's both sour and rancid but not like the taste of rot. Altogether, it tastes like some sort of insect broth. Speaking of which, what is this *gachi* *gachi* crunchy texture I'm getting? What meat is this huh?

"Lord Liu Bei, your expression is a little scary."

"No, you must have seen wrongly." I hurriedly hid my face and shut my eyes tightly so they couldn't see the tears that were forming.

"Then..."

Just like with Yun Chang, Gan Qing was similarly anticipating my judgement as expected.

"De... Wu..." I was attacked by another intense wave of nausea mid-sentence and had to hold my breath and steel myself before I could continue. "Delicious!"

"Really! That's great!" Gan Qing crossed her fingers and looked elated.

Hu, looks like these 2 are satisfied.

... I, on the other hand, had an intense urge to rush to the toilet.

"Big brother, eat these too."

"Mine as well, I made all these for big brother too."

(TL: Yes, she changed how she addressed him out of nowhere. Sneaky~)

Just as I was about to get up and leave. these 2 stopped me. And so, 2 sets of dishes which I did not even want to look at were pushed in front of me.

... I actually have to finish these?!

"U, umm, Gan Qing Yun Chang, why don't you call the others here too and we can eat together."

I got up as I said so, hoping to escape under this excuse.

"Ah, they've all tried it already." Yun Chang said.

Eh?

They have tried this already?

"But after they did so, they all said they felt very tired and went to sleep. Even Lord Feng Xian and Lord Hua Tuo who just came back gave the same reaction."

Everyone... I hope I still can see you all tomorrow...

"Big brother, why are you crying."

"*Shiku*... I'm just that touched~"

Today is probably my day of reckoning. And looking at the situation, there is no escape.

But thinking about it from their point of view, I can't blame Yun Chang and Gan Qing. They did this with good intentions, in the hope of giving me a good meal. In that case, as the one who should actually be grateful to tears, I must finish it all.

A drop of liquid that I could not tell if it was tears or sweat fell down my face. With feelings that could be either happiness or sorrow, I ate 2 plates of what looked to be normal food but was actually mysterious substance X, trembling all the way as I did so.

But by the time I reached my third bite, my consciousness was hazy.

Yun Chang, Gan Qing, I'm sorry. All the rest who have met with a similar untimely fate, I'll be there soon.

I steel myself, and swallowed this bite, only to feel faint and lose all feeling shortly after.

(TL: RIP, the end. Thanks for reading~)

By the time I regained consciousness, it was already the next day.

"Un..."

I moaned as I slowly opened my eyes.

“Big brother, you finally woke up! I was so worried!”

“Un? Where is this?” I looked left and right bewilderedly. After surveying my surroundings, I found that everyone was gathered around me.

And the ones right in front of me were Yun Chang and Gan Qing.

“This is your room.” Gan Qing said tearfully. “I’d thought that Xuan De was going to die just like that.”

(TL: So sneaky, leveling up how she calls him. She actually calls him 玄德哥 here but it’s retarded to leave -ge in or translate it so I’m taking it out. This series isn’t that big on honorifics anyway. Not the untranslatable ones in any case.)

“It’s our fault. We should have tried it ourselves first.” Yun Chang’s head was low and she had a look of utter regret on.

Though the rest looked alright, they were all clutching their stomachs and had terrible looks on them as they nodded in agreement to what Yun Chang said.

“Haha, just take it slow. If you practice more, you will definitely get better.” I leaned forward with difficulty and rubbed Yun Chang’s head. I really hoped she wouldn’t forget the part about trying it herself first.

“Speaking of which, does everyone know about the results of yesterday’s negotiations?”

I had come back late yesterday, and was not able to notify everyone immediately then.

“Hua Tuo and my lord had explained to us last night but we don’t really get it.” Wen Yuan said with a helpless smile as she frowned.

Ah... Looks like the communication abilities of these 2 need some work huh...

“But,” Wen Yuan continued, “We understood what transpired after Sun Qian and the other 2 came over and gave us a detailed explanation.”

“So we’re staying here for a while more then?” Yi De said listlessly as she hugged her head.

Looks like everyone is numb to rushing about already huh~

“Un, we’ll be staying here until Meng De does something.” I got up with difficulty and touched my empty stomach. “Hai~~~ As expected, I’m a little hungry...”

“Then let me...” “I...”

“With your current skills, you 2 probably can’t make something edible yet.” I interrupted the two of them and said as I smiled, “In any case, work hard first. Let me taste it when you

reach a level where you can eat it yourself. I'll definitely finish it then."

I gave them a thumbs-up to encourage them.

"Okay."

The 2 of them agreed very unwillingly, but at present, I could only harden my heart and say so.

"Then, why don't I..." Zhang Liao was midway through her sentence when—

"Lord Liu Bei, Lord Liu Bei." A small cute voice interrupted from outside. Mi Zhen came squeezing in with a claypot on a tray. "I specially made some porridge for you, please eat it."

Oh~~~~ Such a mature child for her age.

"No need to trouble yourself then, Zhang Liao. I'll just have this porridge... Mi Zhen, thanks for your concern." I smiled as I rubbed Mi Zhen's head, as she giggled. "Come, let me try it."

I set the claypot on the blanket and lifted the lid to find a most ordinary porridge.

Maa, it's already very good to achieve this.

I picked up the spoon, and took a scoop of porridge and just when I was about to put it in my mouth when—

(TL: The spoon here doesn't refer to the Western one. It's that one you find in Chinese restaurants, which is typically used for soup and rice.)

"This is actually my first time, so it's not too good."

Eh?

My hand which held the spoon came to a stop once more.

Chapter 8: Don't tell me this is a certain day in Xu state

TL: Here I bring to you part 1 of 3 on 'How to seduce 3 capable girls and live a wonderful gigolo life'

"... Here." "Lord Liu Bei, this stack of silk tissue and bamboo scrolls is your work quota for the first half of today." "If you don't finish this by noon, you can forget about lunch."

(TL: People in ancient China used silk tissue before paper was widely used.)

"..." After a few days of safe, secure and carefree living, the Xu state 3 called me over. Just as I took a seat, a small mountain of bamboo scrolls and a stack of silk tissue thicker than a full length dictionary was placed before me. "... You mean for me to do all this?"

Nods.

No way...

I'd thought I was just a guest too~~~ I never thought I had to work~~~

"That is a given." "Lord Tao Qian's health is lacking so even if you do not assume the role of Governor, these day-to-day administrative work still needs to be done by you. "Don't worry, we'll help out. Ah, Chen Deng and his father will help too."

(TL: Chen Deng is still male here. He and his father Chen Gui were officials that served Tao Qian, and later on, Liu Bei as well.)

"Why don't you all do it then?" I said irritably. "And to be honest, I don't know any of this."

There is no way that an ordinary high schooler can govern a large swathe of land well. It's better to know my limits than to blindly assume responsibilities that I can't fulfill.

"Everything is difficult in the beginning." "This sort of thing is actually really easy anyway, you just need to get used to it." "Lord Liu Bei need not feel too pressures, though one wrong decision could imperil a whole village or town."

How is that supposed to help!!

"Un..." I picked up the brush very unwillingly and opened the first bamboo scroll before me. "What is this? ... Umm, can someone help me read this..."

"..." "You, you can't read?" "... Pu."

"Don't laugh okay?!"

I just can't understand the words in your era, that's all.

There's no helping that this era uses the characters from the Han official script instead of

the contemporary Chinese simplified script. Though I still can make out most of the words, reading long passages is still very difficult.

(TL: This isn't just traditional script. Traditional is still very intuitive if you know simplified. Most Chinese characters undergo at least one revision every dynasty or so, so a lot of words can seem unrecognisable.)

"We don't have too much time for this, so you will have to work hard on your own." Sun Qian said as she stood up and held a bamboo scroll which she started reading out from. "For example, this one is a report by a local agricultural official that the autumn harvest in Xiao Pei is predicted to fall short of targets, and asks if we should start preventive measures or if we should prepare for the shortfall."

"..."

There is listening, and then there is understanding. Throwing out a problem that only an experienced agricultural official can understand and resolve on short notice, what are you expecting from me?

"Looks like you don't understand." "You should suggest preventive measures." "But you probably can't suggest anything concrete though."

"Wu..."

Why did you ask if you knew then. Though I was regarded by them as incapable and ignorant, it was the truth and I could not refute this.

"In any case." "Leave this agricultural matter to us while you look at others." "... Looking at you, this amount of work will definitely not be done by noon... Gong You, stay here and help. Delegate some minor tasks to Lord Liu Bei."

"..."

Sun Qian did not reply, and so I turned to look at her, and saw that she was nodding wordlessly.

Though Sun Qian's expressionless countenance had not changed, she probably felt like she got a whole lot of trouble dumped on her is what I thought.

The other 2 then gave Sun Qian some broad instructions and left thereafter. Seeing the 2 figures from afar, I felt that this sight was really unnatural compared to the usual 3.

"Now then." Sun Qian searched the stack of silk tissues and read out loud from one...

... No more.

This is way too dry.

"Now then, next." Sun Qian took another sheet of silk tissue out from the stack and recited

from it the same way she had done since an hour ago, “This one is—”

“Excuse me...”

“... Is Lord Liu Bei thirsty?” Sun Qian said calmly after being momentarily surprised at my words.

“No... I was wondering if you were thirsty.” I said helplessly as I looked at Sun Qian.

From the beginning, Sun Qian would basically recite the contents of a particular matter from a silk tissue, I would then ask her what she thought and then Sun Qian would then go on a long tirade that could last for almost 10 minutes, of which I could not understand most of what she said. In the end, I had to resort to saying ‘Th, then let’s do it that way then.’

No matter how you look at it, she is at most merely consulting me. But since she already had ideas on how to resolve each matter, why does she have to hear my opinion on it?

“I’m okay.”

She really doesn’t say much huh~~~ No good, I need to escape.

“...” I silently got up and said, “I’m going to the toilet.

As long as I step out of this room, I’ll be free.

In any case, it’s not like I’m needed here. Rather, she can probably settle things quicker if she doesn’t have to recite them to me.

“Does Lord Liu Bei intend on running away?”

“!!” I froze in place on the spot in mid-motion and turned my head stiffly to Sun Qian and smiled. “Wh, what are you saying? Didn’t I just say that I’m going to the toilet?”

“... Lord Liu Bei is intending on running away right?”

“How could that be? I was just...”

“Lord Liu Bei is running away?”

“Yes.”

I gave up. She gave me no room to escape at all.

And so I resignedly made to return to my seat with my head hung low.

“...”

Un?

Sun Qian was standing in front of me between me and my seat.

“Eh?” I raised my head and looked at Sun Qian who was one head shorter than me and her deep black eyes locked onto me, her face close enough that it was almost touching mine.

She slowly raised her hand and said as she pointed outside.

“... Perhaps we should take a break.”

“Then—”

“Before noon.” Sun Qian continued. “We must return before noon, and I will be accompanying you.”

How did it become like that?

“Why are you escaping with me?”

“Because Zi Zhong and Xian He have left you to me, you’re my responsibility.” Sun Qian said as she looked at me with a serious face. “And I can also browse the shops in the city while I’m accompanying you.”

“Well, I don’t actually mind that at all...”

As I said so, Gong You nodded and did not say any further. I frowned as I did not understand what to do next and decided to go ahead with the plan to leave.

As I turned and headed outside, I could hear the footsteps of Sun Qian following behind.

Xu state city was big, and well-governed by Tao Qian so no matter where we went, we were always greeted with a sight of peace and harmony.

“Sun Qian, do you know any interesting places in the city?”

“... Nothing in particular.”

“Th, then do you have any place in particular you want to go?”

“No.”

“Sun Qian, what sort of activities do you engage in outside of work?”

“Hang about Zi Zhong and Xian He.”

“That, that’s not really an activity...”

So, so suffocating... I have no idea what to talk about. Could this be because I have no experience in conversing with girls?

Or could it be that conversation from her flows freely only when it’s about work? When Tao

Qian had said that she was good to speak with, he couldn't be just referring to work right.

"Un... Is Sun Qian the 'mukuchi' type?"

(TL: Mukuchi or 无口 is an ACG (anime, cartoons and games) archetype for females that don't speak. In short, Chinese otaku lingo.)

"What is that?"

"No, nothing."

She probably wouldn't understand even if I tried explaining.

I looked about left and right listlessly.

I wonder what Feng Xian, Yun Chang and the rest are doing now. It wouldn't be strange for them to be having fun somewhere somehow in a city this big.

"Sun Qian, how did you 3 end up working under Tao Qian?"

"I was here from the very beginning. Mi Zhu was originally a merchant who switched over while Jian Yong came to join Tao Qian from the north."

What a simple and clear summary.

"Look at that—" Sun Qian pointed to a 2-storey tall building. "That's Mi Zhu's house."

Oh~~~ Having this sort of house in the city should be quite the luxury in this era.

I really couldn't tell that the Mi Zhu who was always happy-go-lucky was actually an accomplished merchant.

No wonder old man Tao Qian put her in charge of finance.

"Un? What's up over there?"

I saw that there was some commotion over at the city gates and asked Sun Qian.

"... Could be refugees from the north." Sun Qian said as she headed in that direction, as I followed behind. "I've received information that Yuan Shao has been expanding her lands recently."

Yuan Shao is it?

I wonder if Gongsun Zan and Han Fu are alright.

When we neared the city gates, I involuntarily gulped. The sight before me was much harsher than I had imagined.

The refugees at the gates were numerous. By my rough estimations, there were at least 7-

8,000 of them and Xu state city definitely does not have the space to accommodate all of them.

“Sun Qian, what do we do with them?”

We wouldn’t be chasing them off forcefully right?

The term ‘refugees’ does not elicit much optimism and what I saw before me reminded of scenes of disaster I’d only seen before in movies and TV shows.

“... In any case, we should give them some food first.” While I was still dealing with the swirling feelings of pity and sadness inside me, she had went to speak with the city guards and returned to where I was. “Lord Liu Bei, please wait while I go ahead and hear about the situation from the refugees.”

“Ah, wait.”

As she said so, Sun Qian made to leave but I managed to catch her by the sleeve.

“I’ll go too, though I don’t know how much help I can be of.”

“...” Sun Qian nodded wordlessly and so we headed to where the refugees were together.

The refugees were from all over the country but the bulk of them were from the north. All of them shared the same reason for running southward – To escape the flames of war.

Wars and conflicts over territory can happen anywhere and anytime in this era, and many commoners will inevitably suffer greatly because of this. Though it seemed peaceful here, I must not forget that we are living on a knife-edge.

“Un, I understand the overall situation more or less.” Sun Qian said as she nodded.

When Sun Qian was asking around just now, most of the time she was listening and gave an ‘un’ in reply, and did not raise many follow-up questions either.

Just then, Sun Qian walked over to me.

“How is it?”

“There are almost 100,000 refugees. I’ve decided to let some of them stay here in Xu state city while the rest will be sent to other commanderies and counties under our jurisdiction.”

“So you’re taking all of them in then?”

“If we don’t take them in, they have no choice but to head further south. Judging by their condition from speaking with them before, they probably won’t make it,” Sun Qian said as she looked at them, “And I think that they probably aren’t too willing to leave. When I was speaking with them just now, their eyes and faces told me that they hope to be able to find a place they can stay here. At the same time, their timidness stems from fear that we will drive

them off.”

“...” I looked at Sun Qian and was amazed at how much she understood those people despite speaking so little.

Perhaps it’s not that Sun Qian speaks little, but that she understands most things through observing, listening and coming to an understanding without having to elicit answers from the other side.

There’s no way to ask the refugees if they can still make a longer journey elsewhere after all without alarming them. The things that others aren’t willing or able to say can only be ascertained by one’s efforts to understand their point of view and how they think.

Just like when I said I had to go to the toilet, my frustrated look had already exposed my true intention of escaping to her. At the same time, she agreed to come out with me as a solution to the problem of my lack of focus and will.

Being good to speak with and being good at speaking are 2 different things as the former emphasises listening and understanding while the latter emphasises projecting what you mean.

I see, I see.

I now more or less understand what Tao Qian means. Sun Qian is indeed the one who is most suited to be one’s confidante.

These were my thoughts as I looked at Sun Qian who was directing the refugee work flows amongst the officials, troops and guards.

“Alright, I’ve delegated all the work. It’s not getting any earlier so let’s...” She had finished making the necessary arrangements and turned back to me and said, “Un? Is there something on my face?”

“Ah? No, nothing.” I realised that I was staring at Sun Qian the whole time I was lost in my thoughts and shook my head I replied.

“Un... Let’s go then.” Sun Qian might have felt something from my expression but she did not ask further.

“Go back?”

“Un, it’s going to be noon soon, Lord Liu Bei should go get lunch.” Sun Qian said.

“And you?”

“I have other plans.”

“To do my administrative work for me?”

“...”

Sun Qian did not reply. She probably doesn't lie, and her silence is an affirmation of what I said.

As I thought, Sun Qian probably never intended for me to go through all those documents from the very beginning.

When Sun Qian said to return before noon, she actually meant that for herself. She had to fulfill her responsibilities of supervising me, and intended to return before noon to finish the work so that there wouldn't be nobody there when Mi Zhu and Jian Yong came to check on things. Even if I wasn't there when they came, it would have been fine as long as the work was done.

“I'm not in a rush to get lunch so I'll help you too... Ah, haha, it's actually my duty to begin with though.” I smiled as I said so to Sun Qian.

“But...”

“Aiya, you don't need to be too concerned about taking care of me,” I smiled to Sun Qian as I placed my hands on my hips, “When you're with me, you can relax a little.”

“... Un.” Sun Qian stared at me for a bit before nodding. As she raised her head, she used the calmest voice and said, “As long as you don't end up giving me more work.”

As she said so, Sun Qian began walking off.

“Haha, I'll try my best...”

I said as I laughed and quickly followed her.

It might be better if I don't go, but I intend to help where ever I can, no matter how small of a contribution it may be. After all, I can't continue being so ignorant and useless.

“And,” Sun Qian who was ahead turned and said with a slightly reddened face, “Please call me Gong You from now on, my lord.”



Chapter 9: Don't tell me this is another day in Xu state

Ah~~~~ So peaceful~~~~

I was currently sitting at the stone table in the courtyard, staring blankly into the sky like an old man.

Though I had experienced a nightmare at this stone table, the table itself was not to blame. And now that I'm enjoying its coolness, I am truly thankful of its existence.

"Hai~~~~" I gave a long exhalation as I lay on the cool stone table.

Though the seasons had begun to change, the summer heat was still standing strong against the measly winds that had begun to blow.

Today is a good day.

Yun Chang and Yi De had gone shopping, Feng Xian and Zhang Liao had gone to practice at the drill grounds, and Hua Tuo was teaching Gan Qing and Mi Zhen how to cook.

If I could have my way, I would have wanted Yun Chang to learn from Hua Tuo as well. Whatever the case, today is a rare chance for me to relax alone.

For some reason, I feel like everyone has been treating me differently ever since Gan Qing joined us. Though I can't quite pinpoint how or why things have changed, it's just gotten a bit more tiring since.

On top of that, everyone seems to be talking about things that I don't understand, making me feel as though I am out of step with the times... Though I am out of step to begin with.

But I don't need to think about all that today because today is my rest day.

Having days like this once in a while, as for my plans for the rest of today...

Whatever goes~ Lazing about all day sounds good too~

"Yo~ You're here as expected huh~"

However, just as I was entertaining such lazy, carefree thoughts, a drawling voice came from the door.

"Eh?" I uttered as I looked over, and saw Jian Yong was there.

"Eh what eh huh?~~~~" She said as she fanned herself with a fan in her right hand, her eyes half closed with an irritated looking on her. "At least go have a look at the documents today, Gong You is waiting for you."

Ah... There was that huh.

“Eh? Wasn’t it just a one day trial?” I said, feinting ignorance.

“Trial?” Jian Yong said as her eyes bulged in disbelief, “Come on you, you should have some awareness of an official’s responsibilities by now, though you aren’t one yet.”

Un...

But leaving all that aside, it’s surprising for Jian Yong of all people to be the one to come find me.

“Oi! Are you listening to me?”

“Uwaa! Don’t come so close all of a sudden...”

I was caught off guard by Jian Yong who suddenly walked right up to me.

“Let’s go, quick.” She grabbed onto the hem of my clothing as she said so, “Xuan De.... No, Lord Liu Bei.”

Un? Did she just call me....

I looked at Jian Yong’s face but I could only sense a faint change in her usual expression.

Very quickly, I was hauled over to the study table by Jian Yong.

However, we did not see Gong You who was supposed to be waiting there. Instead, there was an IOU note on the table that said ‘I’m borrowing Gong You.’

The signee was Mi Zhu.

“Gong You was actually summoned by Zi Zhong. How could she not have told me huh~~~” Jian Yong said irritably as she looked at the note.

“In that case, you help me out then.” I said as I pointed to Jian Yong and the pile of books and bamboo scrolls.

“Me?” She frowned as she pointed at herself. “Stop kidding, why do I have to help clean up your mess huh?”

... Her attitude is way too different from Gong You’s.

“Then what do we do? I can’t handle it alone without Gong You...” I lamented as I looked at the endless number of bamboo scrolls.

“Un? When did you start calling her by Gong You?”

“Ah? Ah... That is, isn’t it more intimate this way.”

I turned my head away as I thought back to what happened that day.

“Hai~ If you don’t want to say it, then forget it.” Jian Yong drawled, her voice dragging out longer than usual. “Anyway, just leave the work alone then.”

I’ve been waiting for this from you.

“Un, let’s do it like then, until Gong You comes back.”

As I said so, I smiled and decided to make my way back to my sanctuary, back to the stone table—

“Come back, whoever said you were free now huh.” Jian Yong grabbed my hem yet again.

... What else do you want huh?

“Come drink with me.” She wriggled her butt and showed me the wine gourd hanging at her waist.

Jian Yong seemed a little excited as she said so, and immediately set out while I had no choice but to follow.

But!~~~

“Are we really going to drink? It’s not even noon yet~~~”

“Why can’t you drink before noon?” She said irritably as she turned around with her hands on her hips. “Just follow me, I know a good place.”

Though I wanted to say that I was still underage, I had no right to say so after having drank liquor quite a few times already.

But why is she always pulling me around by the hem of my clothes huh~~~ It’s not like I won’t go...

“We’re here.”

“That’s fast!” We’d only walked for a short while and we had arrived at our destination already.

I raised my head and checked out the interior of the place and found that it was just a small, ordinary shop. I tried to find the signboard but it was covered with a layer of dust that was so thick, I couldn’t even read the name out.

“Go on in, it’s my treat.” She let go of me and pushed open the door. “Xiaoer, the usual.”

(TL: Xiaoer, or 小二, is what people call the waiter or attendant at eating places in ancient China.)

“Yo, here again huh?” The xiaoer shivered and went further in to heat up the wine.

Looks like Jian Yong is quite the frequent customer here huh.

There were all sorts here, but most of them were from the lower classes. It was also very raucous here.

“Lord Liu Bei, will you be eating anything?”

“No, no need.” I waved my hand as I looked at decadent demeanor. “You’re sure you want to drink now?”

“Didn’t you ask that before already? You’re so longwinded huh~~~” Jian Yong drawled on as she played with her fringe. “Or is it you don’t believe in my drinking capacity?”

“No no, I didn’t say that. And drinking capacity can only be ascertained after we actually drink.”

Every place had rather different kinds of liquor. In Zhuo commandery, the liquor there was almost like sweet wine while the liquor just slightly south was a lot more alcoholic.

(TL: Japanese equivalent is amazake.)

“Hmph!!” Jian Yong snorted dismissively. “Not that I’m bragging but even 10 bowls is not a problem.”

(TL: It’s actually a large cup but its closer to a bowl than a cup.)

As she said so, our wine was served.

Is there really no problem? I hope so.

“I’m not drunk!”

“Can you please walk properly? Then again you can’t even speak properly anymore...” I said helplessly as I dragged Jian Yong, who could barely even stand, up and out of the shop.

How is this no problem?!

Just before we left, the xiaoer had told me that though Jian Yong ordered 10 bowls every time, he only served 1 after he learnt of her capacity from her repeated visits.

I must say, good job xiaoer. If you had served even one more bowl, she would definitely be out cold and I wouldn’t be able to even move her then.

“So weird huh~~~ I... I remember I was pretty good at drinking back up north?~~~”

“Wine from the north? ... Is it sweet wine?” I replied, and then asked, “Where do you live? I’ll drag you back there.”

“... Oh... Zi, Zi Zhong’s house. The room to the left on the second storey.” Jian Yong slowly said.

Oh? She’s staying at Mi Zhu’s place?

“Oh, I got it.”

As I said so, I looked about and soon found the tall building and began walking with Jian Yong in that direction.

“No! You don’t know anything!!” But just then, Jian Yong began kicking up a fuss for some reason. “You clearly forgot about me! You clearly don’t know anything!!”

“Oi! Don’t flail about.” Because of her sudden shaking, I nearly fell to the ground along with her. “But what did you just say? Were those just drunk words?”

I have no idea what Jian Yong is saying. Just a while ago she was still in a drunken stupor but now she was so agitated... Though all she said were just drunk words.

“I’m not drunk!!~~~” She threw a tantrum just like a kid and flailed her arms at me. “Ish not me who ish drunk!! Itsh Xuan De who ish drunk!”

“Haa? ... Alright alright. Just go and have a good sleep when you get home and it’ll be alright.”

“...”

“Un?”

Why did she go silent?

“*Shiku*... *Shiku*...”

“Un?!” I heard an ominous sound and looked at Jian Yong’s face, “Why are you crying?! Even if your drinking capacity is not like you thought it was, you don’t need to...”

“I’m not drunk! Xuan De do you really not recognise me anymore?! Did you even forget how I used to grab on to you like that?” Though her face was streaked with tears and her body was trembling, she still held onto the hem of my clothing. “I’m xiao Yong! Your childhood playmate!”

(TL: Remember when I said Jian Yong is Liu Bei’s childhood friend/acquaintance in the original?)

... Playmate?

No way. I clearly remember that we met for the first time 2 weeks ago... No, wait. She said childhood playmate...

“Umm, do you mean that we met a long time ago?” I looked away and felt at a loss as to how to deal with this situation.

“*Shiku*... That’s right... We were indeed very little then... You probably can’t remember anymore.”

My memory in this era doesn’t even go back more than this year...

“But... I remember it very clearly, when I moved into Zhuo county, that short 1 month I spent with you was truly unforgettable.” Jian Yong continued. Seeing that she had calmed down quite a bit, I continued guiding her toward Mi Zhu’s house. “Some time ago when you arrived here... I soon realised who you were... But I also soon realised that you forgot about me...”

“...”

She spoke in dribs and drabs and we soon arrived before Mi Zhu’s house.

There was a guard at the gate and I dragged her in step by step toward her room after I told the guard what the situation was. There was no issue going in, the only issue was the guard flashing me a weird smile as I entered.

(Translator’s impression: (๔5๔))

Even though it’s not that sort of thing.

Chiya

Wa, so much soil.

The moment I pushed the door open, an utterly messy sigh greeted me... Was this really a girl’s room?

“But then... I soon made my resolve.” Jian Yong was still not done. “... No matter what, I will help you remember...”

Help me... Remember huh.

Unfortunately, I’m not actually that Liu Bei you know.

And didn’t you just tell me everything...

“I’ll help you remember the promise we made then. The promise to ma... Ma... Hu...” Jian Yong fell asleep before she could finish.

Her voice trailed off at the very end just when she had gotten to the most important part.

What was it that she was going to say?

I thought about it with a bitter smile as I found a blanket amongst the mess and put it on her before I left.

As I left the house, I felt empty inside and was assailed by a faint sense of guilt.

Whether it was with Gongsun Zan or not, could I just simply wave away their memories with a simple 'I forgot'?

From where they stand, I am that one and only Liu Bei and they aren't wrong.

I feel that the responsibility for this lies with me.

Since I've become Liu Bei already, then I must shoulder Liu Bei's past as well.

"Did I say something yesterday!?" Jian Yong yelled out as she came rushing into the courtyard early in the morning of the next day.

She still looked like she was in pain, and her hair and clothes were still messy. Such a Jian Yong was now looking at me with a frown on her red face.

"... No." I was stunned for a moment by this shocking sight, and gave a white lie in response.

"Is, is that so... That's good... Anyway it's nothing, I'll come and get you to do work in a while..." Jian Yong seemed relieved when she heard my words and made to leave.

"Xiao Yong?" I couldn't hold it back, and called out to her.

When she heard me call her by that name, she went silent and stopped where she was.

"Though I don't quite remember you... I feel that it's not too late to get to know you from now on."

I calmly said these completely unreasonable words.

"Wu..."

She let out a small cry, as she realised that she must have said quite a bit yesterday.

"This is really so troublesome... I'm fine with whatever~" Xiao Yong said cheekily and turned back around to leave.

"... Speaking of which Xiao Yong, what exactly was that promise we had--"

"My lord you are too longwinded!" Before I could finish, she yelled out at me and ran off without ever turning back.

Ah, she fell.

Chapter 10: Don't tell me this is yet another day in Xu state

"Lord Liu Bei~" I was still enjoying my afternoon nap when Mi Zhu came jumping in and barged into my room. "Aiya~ Why are you still asleep huh!"

With a *sou*, my blanket was pulled away from me by her.

"Aiya~ What's the matter?" Being awakened from my afternoon nap made my head hurt. But just this much won't be able to fully wake me up—

Wu!

"Eh! Eh! Why have you thrown all the bamboo scrolls onto my bed! So heavy!"

All of a sudden, an entire stack of bamboo scrolls cascaded onto me which hurt my body all over when they landed every which way.

"Shouldn't Lord Liu Bei get up by now?" Mi Zhu bent down and said with a wide smile, "Recently your attitude toward work has improved but your efficiency has not increased at all."

I'm really sorry for having no ability at all.

"And so? So that's why you brought all these bamboo scrolls into my room?" I couldn't bear to shove all the bamboo scrolls down the bed as they would break so I endured the numbness from my leg and calmly replied Mi Zhu.

At this time, all the sleep had disappeared from me.

"Isn't it good to save time, however little." As she said so, she took out a brush and ink stone from her pocket. Looks like she really intends to make me do the work here. "I'll grind the ink for you so hurry and look at the documents."

It was late afternoon now...

I looked outside and saw that the red rays from the setting sun were still rather glaring.

"Speaking of which, did you see Yun Chang and the rest when you came in?"

Usually they would all be free about this time, why was the courtyard so quiet?

"Ah, I got them to give a lesson to my little brother... For him to learn how to be a good general."

Mi Zhu had grinded the ink and passed me the brush that had been dipped in ink.

... I was still hoping for them to help me with this.

"Little brother? Isn't Mi Zhen your little sister?" I said as I took the brush.

By the way, Mi Zhen is having an afternoon nap along with Gan Qing.

“I have a little brother as well, called Mi Fang.” I did hear of that name before... “He has been pretty pampered and doesn’t know about virtues and honour so I got everyone to teach him.”

(TL: Mi Fang is a younger brother of Mi Zhu in the original as well, and also good with administrative affairs. He served Liu Bei along with his brother but eventually surrendered to Sun Quan.)

“Is that so, that’s pretty good then.”

As I said so, I opened a bamboo scroll...

“Umm, can you get Gong You here?”

Just then, I thought of Gong You.

I forgot Gong You had always been helping me, and that I can’t actually read these bamboo scrolls.

“She went to Xiapi to settle the refugees.”

“Then... Xiao Yong will do as well.”

I don’t know if she will be willing to help, but I have to try anyway.

“Xian He and Lord Hua Tuo went to Lord Cao Cao’s camp, supposedly to deliver General Xiahou a fresh supply of medicine.”

Ah, deliver medicine huh. In my mind, I recalled the scene as we left and smiled helplessly.

I feel like that lazy nature of her’s will only mess things up... Haha, I hope not.

“Eh, so she’s not around too huh.”

I was down to just myself now.

“Un... Lord Liu Bei.” Mi Zhu thought for a bit before looking at me with suspicion, “Recently you seem to have gotten along with Gong You? Do you 2 interact often?”

“... Ah, yes indeed. The time we spend together isn’t short after all.”

I flipped through the bamboo scrolls haphazardly, and felt that being able to write nicely on these things really was no small feat.

“Un, that’s good. I keep hearing them talk about how they think of Lord Liu Bei these few days. They seem to have taken you as their lord already.”

What they think of me... Huh.

I was a little curious about that.

"Their lord... Huh?" Though that would definitely happen eventually. "But speaking of which, how is Lord Tao Qian's health recently?"

"..." Mi Zhu shook her head wordlessly. "Lord Hua Tuo went to check on him yesterday and her prognosis is that he probably won't live past this week."

"Un..."

"And so, Lord Liu Bei has to really consider the matter of taking over as Governor." Mi Zhu said happily.

"Un..."

Though it is like that, it doesn't feel real at all to me~~~

Just then, the door was slammed open with a *dong*!

"Oi! Lord Mi Zhu! Ah, you're here." Zhang Liao came rushing in frantically and made a beeline for Mi Zhu when she saw her. "Your little brother is arguing with Lord Yun Chang."

Ah?

Arguing?

"I see."

Though even I was getting nervous, Mi Zhu seemed to be very calm.

"In any case, let us go over first."

Mi Zhu gave a long sigh as she said so and led the way to the drill grounds while I and Zhang Liao followed behind her.

"Honour? Compassion? Can they be eaten?"

Just as we reached the drill grounds, we heard the shrill voice of a little boy.

"Oi, brat. Say that again."

"Yun Chang, calm down."

From afar, I could see that Yun Chang seemed to be unusually out of control while Feng Xian and Yi De were struggling to hold her back so she wouldn't end the little boy in front of her.

"Lord Mi Zhu, please pull the little boy away. We couldn't make him leave no matter what. He said that you had to come."

Zhang Liao frowned and gave a helpless expression.

“Un? Why?”

Mi Zhu asked casually despite the scene before her.

Why are you asking why...

“Honour is the way of man, why would think that it is useless huh?!”

“Honour and the like is something that can only deter people from achieving things and can’t solve any problems at all!”

Against Yun Chang’s enraged roar, the little boy did not cower in the least.

“That little brat, how dare he say such things.” Zhang Liao was pretty mad herself.

“... Don’t mind what the child says too much.” Mi Zhu sighed once more and raised her hand as she called out, “Zi Fang, it’s time to eat! Come home now! Stop arguing!”

“Oh? Big sister!! Alright, I got it!” Mi Fang’s attitude completely changed the moment he saw Mi Zhu and gave an obedient reply before he ran off.

Before he left, he made a face at Yun Chang.

“You damn brat!” Yun Chang’s rage seemed to have erupted.

As we saw Mi Fang run off, we rushed over to Yun Chang as well. As we walked towards Yun Chang, I spied Mi Zhu’s expression and saw that she did not seem unhappy.

We asked them what happened, although we more or less already knew from what we had seen and heard.

“Martial arts is not just about techniques. It has always been the practice to teach morals first before techniques. But I never thought that he wouldn’t pay them any heed whatsoever. It drives me mad!”

Yun Chang said, and grabbed a stool to sit in as she simmered in her anger.

“Haha, if everyone was like you, Yun Chang, there wouldn’t be any bad people anymore.” I said with a helpless smile.

Un...

Yun Chang gave a long exhalation.

“Big brother, to be honest, I don’t think that kid is cut out to be a proper general.” Yi De said angrily.

"I too feel that that child does not pass as a warrior." Feng Xian said as she looked at Yi De, before nodding,

Ah~ If these people all say so, then there's no way.

But, this was probably quite a big blow to Mi Zhu.

"Is that so."

Eh?

However, Mi Zhu who was beside me merely nodded with raised eyebrows and seemed like she had accepted this quite easily.

"Is Lord Mi Zhu not surprised?"

Zhang Liao seemed to find this strange as well, and asked.

"I'm alright I guess. Actually, I've felt that it was like that more or less." Mi Zhu said as she supported her chin while she pondered a bit before continuing with a helpless smile, "That boy's personality has already been shaped so he probably can't change it much."

So she had felt that way huh...

Mi Zhu said so, but the smile on her face was a smile which was utterly devoid of any amusement or happiness.

"In any case, Lord Mi Zhu, I am sorry." Yun Chang was in a daze for a bit before she lowered her head and said. "I, or rather us, can't teach Mi Fang. Our ideal of morals are far too different."

As Yun Chang said so, everyone hesitated for a moment before nodding at Mi Zhu.

"It's fine it's fine. I feel that it's already a good thing if everyone can say where he is lacking." Mi Zhu hurriedly waved her hands in an elegant manner, "I apologise for wasting everyone's time. You can do your own thing now. I'll take care of Mi Fang later."

As she said so, Mi Zhu exhaled from her nose lightly and her eyes looked downcast for a moment before she blinked and looked at me, returning her usual smile.

"... Lord Liu Bei, let's return to our work."

Ah, she still remembered that huh.

"But..."

I asked, but Mi Zhu shook her head before I finished. She doesn't seem to want to broach the topic. If that's the case, then I won't ask.

Everyone else left with Yun Chang to go shopping in the city while I was left behind alone with Mi Zhu to do work.

If I think about it, I've never actually had an administrative official with me all this while. The only ones who come to mind are the Xu state 3. Before them, the administrative work seems to have been handled by Yun Chang. I can't believe everything has worked fine till now with just her alone.

"What does Lord Liu Bei think about this?"

"Un?"

Mi Zhu asked me all of a sudden before I could even take my seat.

She didn't specify what she was asking but I guess it's probably about Mi Fang.

"Umm... I think that Mi Fang is still young and probably doesn't know anything."

Perhaps in future, he might be able to understand what honour means.

"... That's not the case." Mi Zhu said after hearing my words and shook her head. "I feel that my little brother can never be a good general for his whole life."

"Eh? Why?"

"... Fate." She found a seat and sat down. "Some people are born brave and strong, like Lord Yun Chang and the rest. Some people are born with a brilliant mind that thinks too much, like Lord Cao Cao. Others are born with a benevolent nature..."

... Is that supposed to be me?

"What you mean is that this is all decided by heaven?"

"Un," Mi Zhu nodded. "I feel that everything is but a directive by heaven and we can't disobey it. All we can do is smile as we face what comes."

Smile as we face what comes... Huh.

"I didn't think that you were the optimistic type."

"Please, this is pessimism alright?" Mi Zhu laughed dryly.

Seeing Mi Zhu's smiling mask, the words from within me flowed out instinctively.

"Though you said it cannot be disobeyed, aren't you doing it anyway?"

"Am I?" She laughed and bent her head to the side.

"..." You still won't admit it? "I heard from Gong You that you were a merchant before, and

quite the successful one too right?”

When I think about that 2-storey tall building, I can't imagine that any ordinary merchant could own that.

(TL: Most merchants had it tough in those days. Though wealth was not as controlled by the noble class in ancient China (because of the examination system that allowed commoners to go all the way up to the highest official ranks that the Qin emperor had instituted, yeah examinations are truly a Chinese thing), it still wasn't easy to be a successful merchant.)

When she heard me say this, Mi Zhu let out a small 'ah'.

“Looking at you, you probably aren't old. Yet you have attained a fair amount of success as a merchant. This is probably in some way due to your talent.” I stopped for a moment before continuing. “Even though you are a merchant, and a talented one at that, why did you give it all up and join the government?”

“That is...”

Mi Zhu was sweating as she did not know how to reply me. She probably intended to give some ambiguous reply and just leave it hanging.

So, I decided to go on the attack.

“Because you don't know. You don't know if your fate, and your life, ends at being a merchant where you can earn a lot of money but not accomplish anything that can change the world.”

“... Ah.” Mi Zhu pondered for a bit before she smiled and nodded.

Indeed, talent does exist and it is difficult to accomplish much without it.

But nobody knows what exactly they are talented at, nor what their limits are.

“Though you know that your little brother is not suited to be a general, you still held on to the hope that someday he could become one and tried, no?” I stared right at her for a while before I lowered my head and continued, “... I feel that Mi Zhu is the kind of person who defies fate. Don't give up. Not now, not ever.”

Don't give up on yourself, and don't give up on Mi Fang.

I brought back what I said to the original topic and looked back up to see her reaction.

“... Hai~” Mi Zhu sighed after remaining silent for a bit before she smiled, “I didn't think that Lord Liu Bei would understand me better than I do. To be honest, I never thought about it that much.”

“Ah, I didn't really...”

Now that I think about it, I did say a bit too much right?

“Just as Lord Tao Qian said, you are indeed an unfathomable person” Mi Zhu suddenly said.

What does Tao Qian say about me huh.

...

Un?

Wait.

“Don’t you call Lord Tao Qian ‘my lord’?”

On hearing me ask that Mi Zhu stared at me with her big round eyes and flashed me a most charming smile.

“Haha, what are you talking about? My lord is Lord Liu Bei.”

“Eh?”

Mi Zhu saw that I was bewildered and smiled as she explained.

“Actually, before the negotiation with Lord Cao Cao, Lord Tao Qian had already told us to judge Lord Liu Bei for ourselves to see if Lord Liu Bei was worthy of our service.”

“... I never knew this.”

No wonder Gong You and Xiao Yong changed how they addressed me. I’d thought it was just a whim of theirs but it was actually because of this earlier arrangement.

“So what you mean is that you recognise me as your lord now? Even though I’ve done nothing?”

“...” Mi Zhu shook her head as she smiled, “Maybe you don’t know it but your thoughts are a lot more moving than your actions.”

Is that so... To hear that is kind of embarrassing though.

“Is, is that so.” I lowered my head and opened a bamboo scroll which I looked into so I wouldn’t see her.

Except that, I couldn’t read it.

I was their lord already huh...

Un...

“Umm, Zi, Zi Zhong. If it’s possible, could you please help me read this?”

Mi Zhu was surprised at hearing me call her that but she then bent her head and replied with a radiant smile—

“It would be a pleasure to do so.”

On the same night—

Dong *Dong* *Dong*

“Open up!! Open up quick!”

The guard at the top of the city gates looked down and saw a figure knock on the gates without stopping. That figure seemed to be carrying someone as well.

“Who is it?!” The guard asked irritably.

On hearing an answer, the figure below hurriedly responded.

— Pl, please notify the Governor! Tell him that the Governor of Ji state Han Fu and her subordinate general Zhang He are seeking refuge!

Chapter 11: Don't tell me this is the end of Han Fu

TL: Good news for Revolution!, the author just posted on the raw page so there should be more chapters soon. I'm guessing he had exams.

"*Nom* *Nom* *Nom* *Nom* ... Wu!"

"Have some water, and take it easy." I said as I quickly passed a cup of water to Han Fu.

"*Guru* *Guru*~~~~ Haa~~~~" Han Fu exhaled as she downed the cup of water in one go.

"My lord, can you please be a bit more reserved?" Zhang He said with a frown from the side.

Han Fu hadn't eaten for 2 days, though the same could be said for Zhang He, yet she showed a lot more control.

"I really didn't think that Lord Liu Bei would be here too." Zhang He got up as she said so and knelt on one knee, "No matter what, Lord Liu Bei and everyone else, we apologise for the trouble we have given everyone."

"Ah ah, it's nothing. Please get up."

I hurriedly waved my hands when I saw what she did.

At this time, I was sitting in the courtyard in the middle of the night with my clothes draped on me with everyone else sitting or standing around.

Of course, some did not wake up.

"You both should be in Ji state. Why did you run here?" Feng Xian asked.

This question was necessary, though looking at the state these 2 were in, one could roughly guess it. As for me, I wouldn't be able to ask it outright.

"..." Han Fu stopped eating and Zhang He sank into silence as well.

"Pan Feng... *Shiku*... *Nom* *Nom* *Nom*" After stopping for a while, Han Fu only spat out these 2 words before she grabbed her bowl and continued eating.

Sadness filled Zhang He's expression when she saw how her lord was.

"... I'll explain everything."

Zhang He sat up straight and took a deep breath before she said.

"I think everyone can more or less guess what happened. Yuan Shao recently invaded Ji state and now Ji state has completely fallen."

"Yuan Shao... Huh?" Yun Chang said with a frown.

"..." Zhang He wordlessly nodded.

Just then, I saw that the Xu state 3 were deep in thought.

"What's the matter?"

"The refugees from recently." "Most of them were from Ji state." "That is to say that by then—"

I think that should be the case as well.

"Yuan Shao's original territories were rich and prosperous and could shoulder the heavy taxes she imposed. But though Ji state is not poor, it is not wealthy either. Now that Yuan Shao has successfully occupied Ji state, it is natural that she will impose heavy taxes that are beyond even those in her own territories on the people there." Zhang He continued listlessly.

"Did you say that the city was taken? I remember that Ji state city's walls are known for their resilience, how was it taken so quickly..." Zhang Liao asked.

"Umm... My lord was forced to give it up." Zhang He lowered her head even more on hearing Zhang Liao's question.

"Eh?"

None of us understood what Zhang He meant.

"Forced to give it up?"

"Un," Zhang He said in a smaller and smaller voice, "Yuan Shao captured Pan Feng, and used him to force my lord to give up Ji state."

"*Nom* *Nom* *Nom*... *Shiku*... *Nom* *Nom*..."

Nobody spoke on hearing this. All of us merely watched Han Fu as she ate. Though she seemed to be concentrating on her food, her sobs could be heard here and there.

"And she agreed?" Feng Xian asked in disbelief.

Zhang He nodded.

I understand where Feng Xian is coming from. For a lord to give up one's territories entirely for the sake of a single general is something utterly inappropriate and unthinkable.

But in a different sense, only someone who can do that can be considered a good lord.

"In any case we have nowhere else we can go. Lord Liu Bei, please accept us on behalf of Lord Tao Qian."

As she said so, Zhang He got up and made to kneel once more.

“Aiya, no need to stand on ceremony!”

I hurriedly pulled her up by her sleeve before she could kneel down and helped her up.

“Even if you hadn’t asked, I was planning on letting you stay anyway.” I said and looked at Han Fu, whose face was still buried in her bowl, and asked, “Pan Feng should be back by now right? Why haven’t I seen him?”

...

After I finished, I realised I had said the wrong thing yet again when I saw that the 2 looked even more sorrowful and stony-faced than before.

“... No, he’s not back yet.” Zhang He shook her head.

“Eh? Why?!”

Wasn’t there an agreement? She already gave Yuan Shao the city, so why hasn’t she released them?

“The agreement was for Pan Feng to be returned when the Yuan Shao Army entered the city, but...”

“But what?” I pressed.

“But after we handed over the city, Yuan Shao’s side went dark and wouldn’t give us an answer no matter what.” Zhang He gritted her teeth and shook her head as she continued, “And now we don’t have an army, and we can’t stay in Ji state city, so we had no choice but to leave.”

No word at all...

“Then doesn’t that mean that—”

He’s dead?

“Don’t worry, Pan Feng will be alright.” Han Fu seemed to understand what Yun Chang was about to say and she put down her bowl before looking over with reddish eyes. “Because my Pan Feng is an amazing guy.”

Though Han Fu eked out a smile somehow, we all know that what she said was baseless and that the worst case scenario was also the likeliest.

Moreover, it was that scatter-brained Pan Feng we were talking about.

I gave a long sigh and got up as I came to this conclusion and hugged my covers tighter.

“In any case, go have some sleep first. We happen to have some spare rooms just around here so we’ll get people to bring some bedding and blankets for you.” I pointed at the available rooms to Zhang He. “You’re both probably really tired so catch some rest and we will continue discussing this tomorrow.”

Just then, Han Fu put down the bowl and got up.

“Thank you!” All of a sudden Han Fu bowed deeply and gave me a salute as she said in between sobs, “Even though we are only acquaintances, you actually...”

Her feelings overwhelmed her and she was unable to continue without bursting into tears.

“Don’t, don’t be like that.” I said as I rubbed Han Fu’s head, “Don’t worry, I’ll see what I can do with Pan Feng.”

“... Un!”

Han Fu forced a smile and nodded when she heard me, and left with Zhang He thereafter,

Everyone was still worried after what we heard but there was nothing that could be done now so we dispersed as well.

Before I went back to my room, I called out to the Xu state 3 and asked in whispers.

(Did you 3 hear anything? About the Yuan Shao Army.)

The reason why I asked them this was because the expression these 3 had faltered upon hearing that Pan Feng had been captured... No, Sun Qian’s expression did not wave.

“... ” “... ” “... ”

All 3 looked in 3 different directions, none of which were where I was.

As expected, they do know something.

(Tell me what you know, don’t try and hide it!)

It was already so late now, stop playing.

The 3 looked at each other before nodding and whispered into my ear.

(... We heard that some prisoners were killed by the Yuan Shao Army.) (In the past few days, some of them hatched a plan to escape but were all captured and executed.) (We feel that Han Fu’s subordinate general is likely one of them.)

I agree with their hypothesis. Pan Feng was indeed the sort of guy who would follow through with a stupid high risk low return plan like that.

But... We can’t be sure of that yet!

He is quite timid so he might not think about escaping.

“Un, alright, you all go and have a rest too.”

This matter is best left for tomorrow.

The 3 saluted before leaving.

I looked at the room Han Fu was allocated to and saw that the lights had long since gone out.

If I think about it, Han Fu has been the Governor of Ji state for quite a while now. To have lost it so quickly, who knows how difficult she must be feeling now.

And on top of that, the uncertainty about the fate of Pan Feng.

I continued thinking about this for a while at the stone table and sighed. I shivered and found that it was getting chilly so I went back to my room shortly after.

However...

“Can’t sleep.”

I tossed and turned on the bed but whether it was because of my inner turmoil or something else, I just couldn’t fall asleep even though I was tired.

Forget it, might as well take a walk and get some fresh air.

Just as I was about to walk out, before I opened the door, weak sobbing sounds could be heard from the courtyard.

“*Wu* *Wu*... *Shiku*— *Kuh*... *Shiku*—” The sobbing came in dribs and drabs, probably out of fear of being heard. “Pan Feng... I’ve lost Ji state, but... But you must return!... Pan Feng! You can’t be dead... Can’t be dead...”

Gradually, her volume increased as she lost control of her emotions.

In reality, Han Fu herself probably knows. That the chances of finding Pan Feng alive are slim since he has not appeared since.

All those who haven’t fallen asleep can probably hear her by now but no one went to comfort her as it would be of no use anyway.

The only thing that can comfort her is news that Pan Feng is still alive.

And at this time, letting Han Fu cry it out might actually be better.

Un...

I dispelled the notion of leaving and returned to my bed as I silently prayed that tomorrow would bring favourable news of Pan Feng's fate. Thereafter, I fell asleep before I knew it.

By the morning of the next day, I awoke at an unusually early time while everyone was still asleep. I left the courtyard and went to the main hall, and told the Xu state 3 to come along with me as I did so.

"Huah~" "My lord you woke up really esrly huh~" "Is there something to do? If there is, then just get the Chen Deng father and son pair- Haa~"

The 3 of them seemed to not have fully awakened but I went into the main agenda right away.

"Send some people over to Yuan Shao and see what information we can get about Pan Feng."

"... Un." "Ah... That can be done, but don't expect too much." "If there hasn't been any news of him until now, then it will be difficult to expect there to be news that he is alive."

Though what xiao Yong said was the truth, I want something more concrete... And I did promise Han Fu after all, so the least I can do is give her a conclusive-

"Report!" Just as I was still in my thoughts, a soldier came running in with a message. "Yuan Shao's ambassador seeks an audience!"

!!

"... Now. I'll see him now!" I was stunned for a moment before I spat out a reply. I frowned and sighed, "Looks like we don't need to send anyone now."

But this is good too. Before everyone one else has woken up, we can zero in on the important matters quickly.

"Greetings Lord Liu Bei." Just then the ambassador arrived. He saluted before continuing, "I have urgent military affairs to attend to back at my base so I will get to the point. I've heard that Han Fu has entered your jurisdiction."

You really did get to the point huh. I never thought that news would spread this fast.

"... Ah, yes." No point lying here.

"If that's the case then our discussions can proceed further."

"Eh? About? You want to finish her off?"

How ruthless can they be.

"Ah, no. That's not it." The ambassador shook his head, and brought out a piece of silk which he handed to me. "This was written by our lord. What I wish to convey to you is all

inside.”

Un... I have an ominous feeling about this.

I slowly opened the piece of silk, and beautiful writing greeted me as I did so.

I really didn't expect that that rich young miss could write so beautifully. As I thought so, I began to read the contents with difficulty. Good thing the contents were not written properly in the old script and seemed to be a form of cursive that was easier for me to read.

‘I have now taken Ji state. As for little Han Fu, I have no intention of finishing her off. In any case, I'm leaving her alone as long as she doesn't do anything funny. As for her subordinates who got captured by me (some ink marks). A, actually I really was planning to let them go after entering the city but who knew that they would try to escape even under such circumstances, so, so I had no choice. Let me be clear about this, I really didn't order Yan Liang and Wen Chou to kill them. Or rather, before I could say anything, they had done so already... I, I really couldn't do anything so I'll trouble you to explain this to Han Fu. But, but it really isn't my fault!!’

After I finished reading it, I wordlessly passed to the Xu state 3.

Rich young miss Yuan Shao's letter became less and less formal as I read on.

But not your fault huh? Who knew that they would try to escape huh?

... What the hell is that rich young miss spouting about. In normal circumstances, if they were captured, they would expect to be executed so why not try to make a break for it?

But I really didn't think that that timid Pan Feng would really... Maybe to him, the precious home with Han Fu and Zhang He was more important than his life.

— Wait for me, my lord.

— I'll be coming to see you now.

Why?

In my head, I could clearly see the confident figure of Pan Feng as he escapes from Yuan Shao's camp. Was the reason for him taking such a risk, all to return to his lord's side?

But now, I will never know.

“... Alright, I got it.” I stood up and decided to fulfill the necessary niceties and send the ambassador out. “Let me see you out.”

As I guided him, he began speaking to me.

“Lord Liu Bei has now gotten hold of Xu state, but many feudal lords are eyeing Xu state hungrily. If you don't mind it, perhaps you can join my lord, we will definitely welcome you.”

I'm still not the Governor yet. And isn't your rich young miss also looking hungrily at Xu state as well? Of course you would welcome me.

"Ah, I'll think about it."

I gave an appropriate answer but he could tell my intent from this and did not press the issue.

Thereafter I sent him off and gave a few courteous words, and after which he left.

Hai~ This is bad.

How do I tell Han Fu about this later? Now that I know the truth, it's hard to talk about it.

As I was deep in thought about this, I made my way to—

"Morning Lord Liu Bei."

"Un? Han Fu, you're awake already?"

Seeing Han Fu awake and walking towards me, I got nervous and blurted out a question.

"Un, I'm awake." Han Fu smiled at me but for some reason, her smiling face was dreadfully pale.

"You don't look so good. Have you had breakfast?"

"Ah, I need to go to the toilet first." Han Fu said, and then quickly walked off.

"Oh, oh." I nodded.

So it's just the toilet huh... Having to face her all of a sudden made me really nervous.

I walked to the main hall, and saw that Zhang He was standing there.

"Zhang He is awake too?"

"... Ah, good morning Lord Liu Bei..." She seemed to be nervous when she saw me and lowered her head as she did so.

I feel like she has something difficult she wants to say...

"Ah yes, an ambassador from Yuan Shao came this morning and gave me a letter... Gong You, have you all shown it to Lord Zhang He?"

"About that." "We put the silk in the main hall and left for a bit." "But we don't know where it got blown to..."

Un? It's lost?

“Speaking of which Lord Liu Bei, have you seen my lord?” Zhang He came up and asked me after pondering for a while. “I’d thought she would be here to eat breakfast but I haven’t seen her.”

“Ah, I saw her. She said she was going to the toilet.”

...

Eh?

She came to the main hall, the silk went missing, and then she went to the toilet with an unusual expression—

Could it be!!

“Lord Liu Bei?!”

I hope my guess is wrong.

I didn’t say anything and sprinted to the toilets as I kept praying in my heart for it to be wrong.

“Lord Han Fu, Lord—”

And then...

When we came to the toilet, I found that my guess was right,

Just as Han Fu herself had said, she was here.

Her small body was slumped against a wall while her hands held onto a knife that was stuck in her chest. The blood on the ground seemed to have begun to dry. On her face was a warm smile.

“Ah! My lord!” Zhang He who came running behind me collapsed to the ground as she held her mouth, completely losing her usually reliable expression, as she saw this tragic scene, “Why... why you too...”

Han Fu probably planned on this the moment she knew he was dead huh...

I frowned and went up to check anyway but her icy hands had no pulse and her tiny nose would never breathe again.

I found the silk beside her but it was of no use anymore.

Because the Governor of Ji state, Han Fu, was now dead.

(TL: In the original, Han Fu did look highly on Pan Feng, but he died easily to Hua Xiong. As for Han Fu, the original had him surrendering to Yuan Shao as he was afraid of an invasion by

Gongsun Zan. Unfortunately, Yuan Shao stripped him of his title and kicked him out. He then sought refuge with another guy called Zhang Miao. After that, the scene is similar to this, a messenger from Yuan Shao arrives and Han Fu commits suicide thereafter.)

Chapter 12: Don't tell me this is my second refusal of Xu state

"What are your plans from now on?" I said to Zhang He who had packed up and was ready to leave.

"My lord is no more, there is no meaning to staying here." She said with swollen red eyes as she tidied her hair and put on her helmet.

"I'll be heading to where Yuan Shao is."

"Eh? Yuan Shao?!" I blurted out.

Shouldn't that your sworn enemy.

"Don't misunderstand, I'm going there to cause some trouble." Zhang He smiled as she got what I meant, "Many things are difficult to solve from the outside so I'll start from the inside."

... That really is devious huh~~~

Zhang He hopped onto the warhorse as she finished. "Lord Liu Bei, I leave the funeral matters of my lord to you all." Zhang He saluted after she finished and galloped out of the city before I could reply.

I just hope that Zhang He doesn't do anything too extreme. But then again, she's not Pan Feng or Han Fu so she should know what to do.

But you're going to leave Han Fu with us just like that? Don't you want to see her one last time? No, perhaps it is because she has to see Han Fu being lowered into the ground that she isn't staying.

Though Han Fu's death is but a minor event in history, as a companion who has been with us for some time, we did have a friendly relationship; and if I said I wasn't sad, that would be a lie. Moreover to see the death of a young girl right before you, who could accept it easily?

Regarding her death, I feel a fair amount of guilt for if I had detected that there was something wrong with her then, maybe...

But now, there is no maybe.

"Forget it, no point thinking about it too much."

I shook my head as I knew deep down that death is something commonplace in this era. Because of that, I often prepare myself mentally for it. And now, that preparation has come in handy.

"Yun Chang, get someone to buy a coffin. Then we'll bury Han Fu." I turned to Yun Chang.

It was going to be noon soon, the sun was shining brightly... No good.

"Un, I got it." Yun Chang was depressed as well but she acknowledged what I said. "I never expected that the usually unreliable little lady would kill herself over the loss of her subordinate general. To be able to go that far, I, Guan Yu, respect her for that."

To greet death resolutely for the sake of Pan Feng... Huh.

I'd felt it keenly before that their relationship had long since exceeded that of lord and vassal so this sort of action was well within expectations. Perhaps, their relationship can be said to exceed life and death at this point.

"Xuan De," Hua Tuo seemed to have just woken up and ran over to me. "Why don't I take a look at her, maybe I can still do something."

If it's Hua Tuo, maybe even the dead can be revived but—

"Don't do it. Lord Han Fu sought death wholeheartedly. Saving her would be equivalent to disrespecting her choice." I said as I walked off.

"How can we accept things as they are?! Lord Han Fu disrespected life itself, no." Hua Tuo unhappily replied.

Disrespecting life... Huh. I never thought I'd hear these words in a time of war.

"Forget it, she's dead for sure. By the time I arrived, Lord Han Fu was no longer breathing nor did she have a pulse ." I said as I waved my hand, "Even if it's you, I'm afraid there's nothing that can be done."

Thinking about it, what I saw really was tragic and sad, to think a cute little girl would stab herself like that... What sort of pain could have driven her to do that? As I thought so, a chill enveloped my heart and I shook my head to dispel this thought.

"Let's put that aside, on your end, I've heard that you've been going over and treating General Xiahou Dun right... Did you tell her about the eyeball?" I asked Hua Tuo.

"Of course not! If I did, General Xiahou would probably not eat for a week at least." Hua Tuo shook her head with a helpless smile.

I think so too... She'll probably get nauseous when she sees things like tangyuan for her whole life if she knows.

(TL: Tangyuan is also called dumpling but dumpling can mean many things if you know east Asian cuisine. Here it refers to a dessert comprising a ball of flour with a cube of sugar inside that is boiled in sugar water. A lot of variations exist so don't crucify me if this sounds different from what you know.)

"That's good. In any case, let's keep this matter between the both of us. It's not the sort of

information that will help anyone anyway.” I said to Hua Tuo.

“Un, this is a sort of consideration for the patient too.”

I looked at Hua Tuo who was now putting her all in being a doctor, and in my mind, I couldn't connect her to the infamous Yellow Turban traitor leader Zhang Jue from half a year ago. But that is a good thing, letting Zhang Jue live on as Hua Tuo is good, no?

Pada *Pada* *Pada*

Just then, 3 hurried footsteps could be heard.

Ah, it's the Xu state 3 as expected. Though they do act alone at times, they are almost always inseparable most other times,

“Oh~ Have you 3 come for a walk?” I asked, feeling much better now after talking with Hua Tuo, though I could tell that they weren't here for a walk. Perhaps there are some documents to handle—

“... My lord, please hurry.” “Lord Tao Qian wishes to see you.” “It feels like he can't last much longer.” The 3 didn't even stop to catch their breath and delivered this bad news when they came to me.

Even Lord Tao Qian is going to—

My heart sank once more.

“Hua Tuo! Quick follow me, there's work for you!!!” I urged Hua Tuo as she followed me back to Tao Qian's room.

“Lord Tao Qian!” I called out as we neared his room. After I entered, the sight of Tao Qian who was weaker than I'd ever seen him greeted me.

“He won't make it this time...” Hua Tuo said after she took his pulse and shook her head, “His life is spent, he will be gone soon.”

“Is there no way at all?” I tried asking again, but she only shook her head.

“Xuan De should quickly make a decision about being the Governor now. This is, after all, the biggest worry that Lord Tao Qian still has.”

The Xu state 3 standing behind nodded.

That's a little too rushed, even if you say it like that, I can't—

“Lord Liu Bei... Liu Bei... *Ke* *Ke*~~~”

“Ah, I'm here.” Hearing Tao Qian call me, I flew to his side. From up close, I realised that Tao Qian was so pale, it seemed like his blood was drained out.

“Lord Liu Bei...” Tao Qian suddenly grabbed my arm and opened his eyes wide as he put all the strength he had left into the words that symbolised what mattered the most to him. “Xu state... Xu state...”

Really, why do you want me to take over so badly...

Just as I was hesitating, the Xu state 3 walked up to me and bowed deeply.

“Please make a decision.” “If you don’t take over Xu state now, Lord Tao Qian will not rest in peace.” “So troublesome, just quickly agree to it, will you.”

These 3 really had to come and pressure me huh. But at the end of the day, I have no experience at all. Don’t think I learnt anything at all on Anxi county.

But by now, the commoners in the city know who I am so that’s one box checked. But this wasn’t the reason why I wouldn’t accept Xu state.

If I accept it just like that, I will undoubtedly become a target for all the surrounding feudal lords. With our meager troops, I highly doubt we will be able to fend them off.

Putting it simply, I can’t accept Xu state as I have no means to protect it.

“Xu state...” Tao Qian was still uttering the same words as before. Looking at Tao Qian, I could tell that he was barely conscious but even so, he still clung onto life so he could hear my reply.

“My lord!!” The Xu state 3 beside me urged me once more.

What do I do, Yun Chang and the rest aren’t here so now I can only count on myself.

Hua Tuo? Right, Hua Tuo is here.

“Personally, I place greater emphasis on my subordinates’ views than my own.” I said as I turned to Hua Tuo. “Hua Tuo, what do you— Eh?”

Hu...

Hua Tuo, how can you doze off at a time like this!

“Eh? Eh?!” Hua Tuo slowly opened her eyes, completely oblivious to what had happened, “Eh!! A, are you talking to me?”

“Un...” I nodded wordlessly.

— Reject, or at least buy more time for me.

Is what I tried to tell her with my eyes.

“Th, that... Isn’t that good? The food is delicious here and the beds are comfortable.” Hua

Tuo said as she gave a satisfied smile, seems like she really likes it here.

However, she did not get what I wanted to tell her with my eyes.

Ah... I forgot. With her vision, she probably can't even see my eyes.

"Ah, that..."

My eyes glazed over as I regretted my decision to seek someone else's counsel. But, Tao Qian's excited eyes made me unable to refuse it and I could only delay things as I looked at everyone in turn.

In the end, I realised that there was no way for me to reject him in such an atmosphere.

"... Alright. I got it." I sighed as I said so, and got closer to Tao Qian as I said in a soft tone, "I accept Xu state."

"Un un." "That's a good lord of ours." "We'll go get the official seal for you right now."

The 3 of them were elated when they heard my words and went off to do the necessary preparations for my appointment.

Personally I was hoping they wouldn't be so hasty about as I wasn't in a rush about it to begin with. Hai, it's all because of that extra 'boost' Hua Tuo gave me.

"Ah, I have to go prepare medicine for General Xiahou." Hua Tuo felt a strange pressure on the air and slipped off as well.

At this time, there was only me and Tao Qian in the room. It was completely silent, until a long exhalation sounded out.

It wasn't me, it was Tao Qian.

"Hai—" Tao Qian put some strength in his limbs and actually sat up in front of me!!

— This was the first time seeing him do any physical exertion.

He looked at me and broke into a wide smile. "Now that you've agreed to take on Xu state, I can relax."

The Tao Qian before my eyes was an old man with a healthy glow in his cheeks who still had a head of black hair. From an outsider's point of view, one would think that Tao Qian still had decades left in him. Nobody would have guessed that he was a sickly, dying man just a moment ago.

This made me doubt that Tao Qian was ill to begin with for a moment. However, the truth was something much less hopeful.

"You're... Alright now?"

“Kekeke.” He only laughed in response. His smile was radiant, but this smile also told me that this was a man who is about to pass through death’s door.

“I don’t know what has happened. I only know that my body felt alive and energetic all of a sudden after you promised me.”

“Ah...” I nodded.

Could it be that... This is the so-called last burst of life before death?

I know that this short time is very precious and decided to ask Tao Qian the one question that had been troubling me all this while before it would be too late.

“Can you please answer one question of mine? While you’re still awake and well.”

“Un? Go ahead.” He said as he waved his hand.

“I want to ask you, what were you thinking, when you let that Yellow Turban escort Cao Song?”

“...” Tao Qian went silent for a bit, his satisfied smile still remaining on his face, before he looked towards me and gave me an ambiguous reply, “Who knows~~~”

“Oi! Lord Tao Qian~”

“Hahaha~” He laughed as he rubbed his bony hands, and continued, “Let me be honest then. At that time, it was the Yellow Turban who volunteered himself to be the escort.”

“... And you let him?”

“Of course I knew he had wicked designs. But I have to admit I don’t really like that Cao Cao fellow.” Tao Qian said as he rubbed his head.

“Why is that?”

“Because I can’t read her.”

“Can’t read her?”

Tao Qian’s words made me recall what Cao Song had said about his daughter.

“Un,” He nodded, “I don’t understand what Cao Cao is thinking, and cannot be sure if she is really supporting the Han or if she is plotting to overthrow the Han.”

“But what does this have to do with her father?”

“Perhaps, I was thinking to test the waters with this act, and see how much Cao Cao can tolerate. I didn’t think that I would reel in something I couldn’t handle.” Tao Qian burst into laughter, though his laughter sounded very dry and bitter.

“And... Now?”

“Un?”

“What kind of person do you think Cao Cao is now?”

From where I stand, I don't think Meng De is a good person but she definitely isn't evil. She is just a very intelligent person who doesn't know how to express herself or depend on others.

(TL: This depiction of Cao Cao is surprisingly accurate. For all of what Cao Cao did, he never took the throne for himself. His evil or 'evil' acts, as you will see later in his volume and others, are more often than not, him losing control out of grief.)

So, I believe Meng De is truly supporting the Han, albeit in a different way than what we would do.

“...” Tao Qian looked at me for a while before saying, “Probably, the same as what you're thinking.”

Eh!!

Did he read my thoughts?

“Alright~ I have to be going soon.” Tao Qian gave another long exhalation and seemed weaker than before, “Before I go, I have some words to say, for you and for Cao Cao.”

“Un, I'll make sure to listen and deliver them.”

Knowing that his time was up, I drew closer to him to listen to his last words.

“To you,” He said slowly as he pointed a trembling finger at me, “You have a long way ahead of you. My tiny Xu state will definitely not be enough to contain you. This Xu state will become a stepping stone for your grand ambitions. Use it boldly.”

(TL: Just a note here that Xu state isn't actually tiny. Tao Qian's lands were one of the bigger areas at the start of the Three Kingdoms.)

“... Un.” I sank into my thoughts for a moment before quickly nodding in reply.

“To Cao Cao,” He raised his hand with great difficulty and pointed outside the city, “What I want to say is—”

He said it in a very soft voice, but I did indeed hear it.

“Such simple words, you should say them to her yourself.” I said as I looked kindly at the cute old man.

“Let an elder save some face, will you?” Tao Qian laughed and then lay back down. “Hai~ So tired~”

Looking at Tao Qian, I knew he had just moments left. But I felt that I had to seek his permission for something that just came to mind.

“Now that you have entrusted me with Xu state, can I do what I want with Xu state to protect its people?”

No matter how much I thought, I felt that the me now cannot protect Xu state.

“If the people can be protected—” Tao Qian lay on the bed and replied, but could not continue and only nodded to finish what he said.

“Thank you.” I got up and saluted him.

“..” He shook his head wordlessly.

“...”

“...”

“Are you leaving now?”

“... Un.” He nodded his head slightly and grunted in reply.

Is that so.

Then please have a good trip.

I silently prayed in my heart, and before a minute passed, the only sounds that were left in the room was my own breathing.

Asleep again?

... Perhaps this time, Tao Qian will sleep a little longer.

I thought for a while in the room and knocked out the kinks in my plan before walking out of Tao Qian’s room and saw that everyone had gathered outside.

“Big brother, Lord Tao Qian...” Yi De said sadly.

I nodded.

“My lord.” “This is the official seal.” “From the moment you receive it, you are formally be the Governor of Xu state and our new lord.”

Mi Zhu brought the official seal before me. I looked at the 3 of them and saw streaks of tears on their faces.

If they said they had no feelings for Lord Tao Qian, that would be a lie. Tao Qian was probably a father figure to them.

Before I received the official seal, I looked at everyone, and seeing them nod, I finally put my hand on the official seal.

At that very moment, Gong You, Zi Zhong and xiao Yong got down on one knee.

"We recognise you as our lord." The 3 said in one clear voice.

"Please get up, you all should know by now we don't do that sort of thing here." I hurried forward and pulled them up.

"Well then." "Our positions now are—" "As newly hired officials, we should be promoted no matter what.

The moment they got up, they started looking to get something out of me... But really, what are the official ranks available in the first place?

"In, in any case, just stay by my side and think of schemes, policy and plans, that sort of thing."

"Stay by your side..." "Aiya, why do you have to be so mushy about it." "Th, that means we are your advisers then."

"Ah, ah, that's it."

But what's so mushy about it?

... But according to my plans, my time as Governor of Xu state will end shortly.

Lord Tao Qian, perhaps this isn't what you want to see but right now, this is the best I can do.

"Ah, now then—" I said.

"Hai~~~ Now we're getting 3 more."

"Little sister, quality is more important than numbers."

"But really, there are a lot to begin with even without these 3."

"My lord you really have a lot of fighting spirit huh. But I, Zhang Liao, won't lose either."

"Big sister Gan, what do we..."

"Maa, just follow me. Don't worry."

"Lord Sun Qian, Lord Mi Zhu, Lord Jian Yong, can you 3 walk closer so I can have a better look?"

"Un." "Okay." "But you really should stop squinting..."

Ahem—

I cleared my throat audibly, and only then did they stop chatting.

“Ah, as the Governor of Xu state, what I need to do now is to safeguard the lives of the people of Xu state.” I declared after everyone quieted down. “But we do not have that ability now, what do we do then?”

“Pre-emptive strike!”

“Yi De, you were quick to answer first but unfortunately, that’s the wrong answer.”

“Eh?”

“Strengthen the city defences.”

“That’s the usual thing people will do but we don’t have that time now. If Yuan Shao wants to invade us, she can be outside our gate by tomorrow.”

I looked at everyone and saw that they could only think in terms of attack and defence, but neither were the most effective—

“Give?”

This one word I threw out seemed to went past everyone except the Xu state 3 who nodded.

“Un, all we have to do is give Xu state away, and the people can be safe.”

“But to whom?” Yun Chang said with a frown. “We cannot be sure the one who takes it is a righteous ruler. If we give it to a tyrant or an inept feudal lord, things will get worse.”

“There’s a candidate already.” “Since my lord has said as much, he probably has someone in mind already.” “Stop the suspense and say it.”

That should be my line to you 3...

“Ahem, that candidate—” I pointed outside the city, “Isn’t she camping outside already?”

Chapter 13: Don't tell me this is my third refusal of Xu state

TL: Lots of Meng De development from this chapter to the end of next volume. Meng De's character is very similar to Oda Nobuna, but with Cao Cao's quirks. Although, then again, Oda Nobunaga is similar in some sense with Cao Cao.

"Long time no see huh, Meng De~" I said as I entered Meng De's tent alone. "How have you been doing recently?"

"Maa, not as free as you think." Meng De gave a bitter laugh as she tidied up the mountain range of bamboo scrolls on the desk behind her. "What about you, why are you here today?"

I looked at her and felt that instead of giving an explanation first, it would be better to just give it to her and so I took it out and handed it over.

"Here."

It was a small box which I had specially made for it, that befitted the item inside.

"Un, this is—" Meng De was very surprised as she took it and for some reason wore an embarrassed look as she said, "Though I don't particularly like jewelry and the like but since Xuan De has given it to me, I'll gladly accept it with gratitude. Thank you Xuan De."

Jewelry? ... What is Meng De talking about?

"Ah, umm, that's not any jewelry." I hurriedly cleared things up.

"Eh?" Meng De's expression changed in a flash and she quickly opened the box— And saw the Xu state Governor official seal inside, "This is—"

(TL: Imagine if it was in the form of a ring.)

Seeing here wide open eyes looking at me, I could tell she was unable to understand my intention.

"To tell you the truth, Lord Tao Qian has just passed away." I said as I sat down with my elbows on my knees.

"... Oh, about time I guess. And then?" Meng De returned to her seat behind the desk. "If I'm not wrong, you should be the next Xu state Governor."

I don't know if Meng De really doesn't get it or if she's faking it but it seems like she was quite deflated after seeing the official seal.

"I feel that I can't safeguard the lives of the Xu state people if I'm the Xu state Governor." I looked at Meng De's face and saw that she had regained her composure somewhat. "But if

it's Meng De, then I believe you are able to do so and I have decided to give it to you."

That's right, 'give'.

This is the only solution-that-is-not-really-a-solution which I thought off shortly after Tao Qian passed away. Presently, the only ones who have the power to protect the people of Xu state are only 2, Yuan Shao and Meng De.

And so, I decided to 'give' it to Meng De.

"So that's what you mean huh~ Although, I did come here with the intention of retrieving this official seal." She said as she looked at it. "But did the others all agree? This official position didn't come by easily after all, no?"

"When I suggested it then, nobody has any objections. I had said then that this was the only way to save the Xu state people and so we have decided to trust you."

Yun Chang and the rest are a non-issue as they had known Meng De for some time after all; but even the Xu state 3 did not have much resistance to the idea and thus it can be seen that everyone trusts Meng De to a fairly large degree.

"And I am, personally speaking, not too interested in being an official." I laughed as I thought back to the harsh times of dealing with documents. "Moreover the position of the Governor of Xu state was not attained by my efforts and so there is no reason for me to be so attached to it."

"Keke, but you're all not afraid of giving it to the wrong person by giving it to me?" Meng De said as she tilted the official seal. Though she said such villain like words, her smile was the kindest I've seen thus far.

"If you're say as much then that means I'm not wrong." I straightened my back and looked outside and found that I could see the far off Xu state city gate from here.

To show our side's sincerity, I came alone this time while Yun Chang and the rest waited in the city.

"In any case, the official seal is with you now. I leave the rest to you." I turned back to look at Meng De.

Meng De only laughed with one eye closed. "Don't worry, I'll make the necessary arrangements. Now then—" She waved her hand. "Xun Yu, Cheng Yu, release information to all other feudal lords that I have taken Xi state and massacred the city in a fit of rage."

"Yes." "Understood."

I heard the replies but did not see the ones answering directly and only saw 2 short figures standing straight outside the tent nod and leave. From the voices... Seems like they're girls.

But more importantly.

“Massacre! Massacre the city!” I did not understand why Meng De said such dangerous words.

“Un, massacre. Xu state Governor Tao Qian tried to kill my father and now I have occupied Xu state. After occupying the city, I ordered my armies to massacre all inside. As for the death toll... Let’s put it as several tens of thousand.” Meng De seemed to be reading from a report as she said all this with a smile. Seeing my face full of doubt, she continued. “Don’t worry, this is just false information.”

(TL: In the original, Cao Cao uncharacteristically killed tens of thousands in Tao Qian’s lands in a fit of anger.)

False information?

“But why do you have to do that? By doing that, aren’t you—”

“Aren’t I giving other feudal lords a reason to come for my life on grounds of being a ruthless tyrant? Haha, actually that’s what I’m hoping for.” Meng De said confidently with a laugh.

“Eh?”

“As the Imperial Chancellor, I can’t launch an offensive on other feudal lords without a legitimate reason. But if they attack me first, then I can launch a counteroffensive.”

“Ah...”

So you thought that far ahead huh. As expected, Meng De’s considerations are different from ours. But Meng De, do you really no care? The people’s image of you will be one who uses military force to crush everything that stands in your way...

“Don’t think too much about it Xuan De. Doing things this way will also let everyone know that Xu state is Cao Cao’s territory and anyone who wants to take it will have weigh his choice carefully.”

Perhaps Meng De read what I thought from my expression. Her smile as she patted my shoulders was the loneliest smile I have ever seen.

“... Alright.” Since Meng De has said this much, then I have nothing more to say, and got up. “I’ll be heading back first. I have to notify Yun Chang and the rest after all.”

“Un, but what are your plans after this? Now that you don’t have Xu state, where are you all planning to go next?”

“Eh?” After hearing Meng De’s question, sweat started forming on my face, “You’re not going to let us stay at Xu state?”

Meng De laughed helplessly when she heard my reply. "You were planning on staying here? ... Of course not. Now that I've told everyone that Xu state is under my jurisdiction, and you're not my subordinate general, how can you all continue to stay here?"

"Eh?!"

Why did it become like this?

"But maybe—" Meng De suddenly said as she rubbed her chin.

"But maybe what?" I pressed.

"Maa, I'll go make the necessary preparations first." Meng De put on a coat as she said so. "Go back first, when I'm done, I'll tell you."

Meng De did not say more, and left after that. What do we do now... I really don't know if I can leave it to Meng De.

"Ah, wait." I remembered something and quickly stopped Meng De who was just about to leave. "Before Tao Qian died, he told me to tell you something which also happens to be something I want to say to you myself."

"Oh? What is it?" Meng De asked with interest.

"— Your responsibilities will be heavy and the journey will be long."

(TL: It's actually an idiom, here I just put what Tao Qian wants to convey. Through these words, he is expressing concern for Meng De and giving advice as one who has done similar things before.)

"... Haha, is that so." Meng De was silent for a moment before she laughed happily and rolled her shoulders. "Hai~ How could such a nice old man just die like that huh."

"That's right, I think so too." I said as I nodded. "But no one can fight death."

"But those words... Indeed." Meng De stretched as she continued. "Even though I've only just really begun my journey, I feel a bit tired already."

"You should remember to rest well too~~~"

"Un, I'll be going now." Meng De gave a helpless smile before leaving the tent.

Time for me to be off as well.

Just as I got up and made my way to the exit—

"Ah, isn't this Lord Liu Bei?"

"Ah, General Xiahou Dun~~~" I saluted her and then pointed at her right eye. "How is it, your

eye.”

Xiahou Dun wore an eyepatch over where her right eye used to be. Though she was a girl, her eyepatch was a very tough black one.

(TL: Dude, what do you want her to use? Pink with Hello Kitty?)

“Maa, though my field of vision has diminished a fair bit, I’m used to it by now.” Xiahou Dun smiled... Seems like it isn’t too big a deal now.

“... Speaking of which, is your appetite okay these days?”

“Ah, it’s good.”

“Any part of you feels uncomfortable?”

“... Lord Liu Bei, why do you ask?”

“No, nothing.”

I frantically waved my hands in denial... Ah, I feel like Xiahou Dun is a pitiful. In my mind, I made the decision to never tell her about that matter.

“Un?” Xiahou Dun was still doubtful of me but she let it pass and left.

I shook my head as I looked at Xiahou Dun’s disappearing back, and then headed back to Xu state city.

“And so Xu state city is now safe, and we are to...”

“Meng De is really too much. Why can’t she just let us stay here?” Yi De said unhappily.

“Lord Cao Cao has her own considerations.” Feng Xian said as she caressed Red Hare. Seems like she isn’t too bothered about where we go.

“We did start off as enemies in this. Even if we only lost in name, this means that the city is no longer ours.” Zhang Liao said as she leaned against the stone pillar in the courtyard. “If we continue to stay here, the other feudal lords may get suspicious.”

Zhang Liao is right. Perhaps this is the very reason why Meng De isn’t letting us stay here.

“Speaking of which, is Lord Cao Cao not arranging something for us?”

“Ah, that... Meng De did say something then but she wasn’t clear on it.” I looked away as I said so. She did say she was going to make preparations but I can’t imagine where Meng De would send us to.

“We can’t rely solely on Lord Cao Cao then.”

What Yun Chang says is right. And so, next is—

“Then if nothing comes out of Lord Cao Cao, where do we go next?” Gan Qing asked the question that was in my mind.

That’s right, where do we go?

“...”

I had no idea at all, and looked at everyone, but it was the same for them.

“In any case, I’m sorry everyone. We finally got a base and I gave it away just like that.” I couldn’t help but apologise to everyone.

I don’t know why but I feel like a good-for-nothing all of a sudden... Although I probably am.

But without power, all we can do is be vagabonds.

“Ah, it’s okay. We’re all used to it already.” Yi De seemed like she was consoling me but I felt even worse after hearing her say so.

“Xuan De, be more confident in yourself.” Feng Xian said calmly as she looked straight at me. “Perhaps you don’t feel it yet but you are already our lord.”

“Lord... Huh.”

“That’s right, big brother.” Yun Chang walked over with a smile. “So no matter what big brother does, we will always be by your side.”

Yun Chang stepped to the side as she finished, and I saw that everyone was smiling at me.

“Yun Chang... Everyone...”

This was the second time I felt a mysterious warmth since the first battle with the Yellow Turban Army. This too was something I have never felt back in the 21st century.

Ah- But now that I take a closer look, I see that in such a short time, there are so many more people with us now.

— Gan Qing, Mi Zhen, Gong You Zi Zhong and xiao Yong.

Though I do not belong to this era, I have many companions with me.

... But speaking of which, are Gan Qing and Mi Zhen following us too?

“Gan Qing and Mi Zhen. You’re both not generals, stay here.” I told them as I thought so.

But it seems like they have objections to that.

“Eh? Why won’t you let us follow?”

“Un, that’s right that’s right.”

“Umm, that is, you see,” After just 2 lines from the both of them, I didn’t know what to say. “You’re not like Yi De and the rest so I’m afraid you both will be in danger.”

You both aren’t my concubines yet so no need to follow me all over China.

(TL: He really says not yet.)

“If you’re worried about us, then all I can say is Lord Liu Bei worries too much.” Gan Qing smiled as she said so. “I’m following you of my own will, Mi Zhen too right?”

“Un! I like Lord Liu Bei.” Mi Zhen said with a smile.

“Oh, thank you little Mi Zhen.” I said as I rubbed her head. “But I can’t ensure your safety, if something happens—”

“I’ll be in charge of protecting her and little sister Mi Zhen.” Just then, Yun Chang who was silent all this while cut in. “It has to be a fair fight after all so I won’t accept a win by default.”

Yun Chang smiled and looked at Gan Qing who returned the meaningful smile with one of her own.

“Ah... Un, alright since you say so.”

Though I don’t quite get what they mean in their eyes.

When I get the chance, I must ask them once and for all what the fair fight is about.

“My lord.” “We were thinking just now and came up with a plan.” “Perhaps you can seek refuge with your clan relatives.”

(TL: By clan, it means distant relatives, like possibly your aunt’s cousin’s son’s niece. Not everyone is as prolific as Genghis Khan in propagating genes but just doing a fraction of what he does and you can create a clan. Plus cost of living was low then so a noble could easily support many wives and even more children.)

“Clan relatives?”

“Un.” “Liu Biao of Jing state, Liu Zhang of Yi state.” “Though the journey may be a bit far, but I’m sure Lord Cao Cao will let us pass.”

I’d forgotten!! That’s right, I’m Liu Bei and I have 2 distant relatives...

(TL: He mentions this later on but I’ll put it here because it’s not really a spoiler. He doesn’t actually know Three Kingdoms stuff all that much, only the main plotlines. And what he knows is only bits and pieces from games and parodies. He is probably the only truly average high schooler main characters there are. No making gunpowder, no cheat abilities, some

knowledge to make use of but not complete.)

Though I don't know them at all, but it's worth trying.

"Un, What does everyone else think? If there are no objections, then let's—"

"Lord Liu Bei." Before anyone could speak, a soldier from the Cao Army had run up to the door. "Imperial Chancellor Cao asks that you and your subordinate generals pack up and prepare to leave."

Un? Has she done her preparations already?

But even if she wasn't done, I still had to go over and speak with her about borrowing passage through.

"Alright, we'll get prepared."

We all packed our things and made our way to Meng De's encampment. When we told her of our intentions, Meng De burst into laughter.

"Aiya, seeking refuge with Liu Biao?" Meng De picked up a piece of silk on the table. "You all might as well follow me to Xuchang."

"Eh? Why there?"

I was bewildered at the sudden suggestion of Xuchang.

"I just finished drafting the recommendation letter for the Governor of Yu state."

"Eh? Yu state Governor? Me?"

"Un," Meng De replied all 3 questions of mine with 1 affirmation. Meng De then laughed as she looked at me, "And so, you will need to see the Emperor Xian of Han."

... Liu Biao, looks like I have to put off knocking on your door.

(TL: In the original, things are a little more complicated. To make it simple, Liu Bei comes to support Tao Qian against Cao Cao and eventually takes over. Liu Bei was then in the same faction as Yuan Shao who eventually betrayed Liu Bei. Lu Bu then came in and took over some lands and eventually Liu Bei was thoroughly defeated by Yuan Shao. Lu Bu then turned on Yuan Shao and Liu Bei fled to Xuchang where he was well received by Cao Cao who made him Governor of Yu state.)

Chapter 14: Don't tell me this is Xuchang

It took about a week of galloping before we got to Xuchang. Just as we had settled in at the inn, Meng De told me to go to the palace with her.

That's right, the palace.

"Wa~ This really is impressive huh~"

On the way to see the Emperor Xian of Han, I was mesmerised by the sight of buildings made out of red bricks and grey tiles that were characteristic of ancient Chinese architecture.

(TL: Whatever there was in Xu state city was not concrete, but rather more 'normal' / traditional buildings that wouldn't be too out of place in say a tier 2 or 3 city in China or even some Chinatown somewhere, and its the palace after all.)

I'd thought that I could only see such things in Zhuo state or Hengdian World Studios, but nothing beats the awe you get from seeing the real thing.

(TL: Hengdian World Studios is an actual place, it's the biggest movie studio in the world.)

"Actually, the palace in Luoyang was 100 times more impressive than this before it burnt down." Meng De said with a helpless smile. "This was something that was built in a rush after all. Honestly speaking, a construct like this isn't fit for the Emperor."

"Ah..."

Though it feels like she is bragging, just from the size of the burnt wreckage, I could tell she was telling the truth.

There shouldn't be a Forbidden City in this era right. Speaking of which, if I let Meng De see what the Forbidden City from the future looks like, would she be as shocked as I am now?

(TL: Make her your empress and build her one!)

"We're here." Meng De said while we were still a few hundred meters away from the main hall.

We're here already? Isn't it still too early?

I looked at Meng De and saw her hand her sword over and say some words to the guard nearby in a soft voice before the guard ran over to the main hall.

(TL: Meng De's weapon is like Liu Bei's, a double edged sword. Compare with Yun Chang single edged Chinese glaive.)

Oh, this I know. Looks like they are going to announce us in a while... No good, this is the

first time I'm taking part in such a big occasion.

I tidied up my clothing and did the best I could to calm myself down.

"Xuan De, you look far too nervous."

"Is, is that so?"

I lost all confidence in my mental fortitude on hearing Meng De say so.

— Imperial Chancellor Cao and Governor of Yu state Liu Bei, enter the hall~~~~

(TL: Liu Bei's full name has to be said because the royal family name is also Liu. The first Emperor of the Han dynasty is Liu Bang.)

(TL: I'm not good at translating these cultural things very well. I do my best, but try to have the image in your head of how the eunuchs or guards would announce the name and title of the person seeking an audience and would call them to enter.)

A clear voice rang out from within the main hall. After Meng De heard it, she went ahead in the direction of the main hall and I followed.

Speaking of which—

"Meng De, though I am grateful for the appointment of Governor of Yu state~" I said, pausing as I was hesitant to continue, "But now that I'm the Governor of Yu state, what should I do? Should I go to Yu state?"

"No, you don't need to do anything."

"Eh?"

"Un, I gave you this position for the sole purpose of letting you settle in Xuchang." Meng De patted my back as she slowed down her pace, "So no pressure at all. It's just a title. I have someone taking care of Yu state already."

(TL: This is a true gigolo life right there. It's like having a CEO / Chairwoman wife who appoints you as director of the board.)

Ah, since it's just a title, then I won't say anything more.

While I do feel weird not having any actual power, it saves me quite a bit of trouble so that's good.

"Ah, additionally," Meng De seemed to have just thought of something and whispered in my ear, "Later when we go in and see the Emperor Xian of Han, do what I tell you to."

Eh?

I didn't get what she meant but followed her anyway, and was shocked when I entered the main hall.

There were more than a hundred over officials in a seiza position in the main hall. Though their clothing had differences here and there, it was not much. There were many people around but it unusually quiet, so quiet that I could even hear my own heartbeat.

(TL: I'm using seiza because kneeling isn't quite right nor is sitting and everyone knows what seiza is.)

I followed behind Meng De who walked ahead toward the Son of Heaven, and used my peripheral vision to see the officials in a seiza on either side. For some reason, they all seemed like they were suppressing their fear and it felt like they were enduring some sort of pressure.

I want to ask why, but at the same time I didn't dare to.

"..." Meng De who was ahead of me suddenly came to a stop and knelt down. Seeing that, I too hurriedly knelt down the same way. After I had knelt, Meng De said, "Greetings your majesty~"

— First of all, do not raise your head and look at the Son of Heaven. Only when the Son of Heaven has allowed it then you may do so.

This was what the most important thing Meng De told me before we stepped in.

"Ah, you're already Imperial Chancellor Cao right. In any case, good work on conquering Xu state. Ari, ri— Achoo! Ah~ *Shiku*~"

Wu... What a disgusting sound from sucking in mucus.

"Come, give me some straw paper... *Xing*~" He blew his nose, "Ah, much better... Ah yes, right, arise arise."

What seemed like the voice of a little boy came from the throne... Ah, don't tell me this little boy that doesn't care about his surroundings is Emperor Xian of Han.

"Let me introduce you, this is the distinguished man I found during my Xu state campaign—"

(Xuan De, introduce yourself, quick.) Meng De whispered.

(Ah, oh.)

"Your servant before you is Liu Bei Liu Xuan De, Governor of Yu state. I have benefited from the kindness of your majesty and have specially come to pay my respects."

"Liu! Isn't that the same family name as me?" The little boy— Ah, no, Emperor Xian of Han excitedly said.

Dong *Dong* *Dong* *Dong* The sound of running footsteps could be heard drawing close. Seems like Emperor Xian of Han has come over.

“Raise your head and let me see...” Emperor Xian of Han said words that seemed more like he was choosing a concubine to me, and I slowly raised my head.

However, what greeted me was not the majesty I imagined a monarch should have.

Isn't he just a snotty little brat?

And he still has a childish lisp so he's probably only 4 or 5 years old...

And Emperor, you still have snot hanging down— Ah he used his tongue to lick it off.

“Aiya, Emperor please don't run off your throne just like that!” A eunuch exclaimed as he ran over.

“You're too noisy you stupid eunuch.” I didn't think that the Emperor Xian of Han would throw a rebellious fit, “Don't just stand there you stupid eunuch. Go and check the family tree and see what relation this Liu Bei Liu Xuan De has with me.”

“But... Th, the Imperial Court is still in session, we should—”

“What are you still doing standing there? Go get it!”

For some reason, the eunuch was terribly unwilling but had no choice and went to the back to get the family tree.

“Emperor why aren't you wearing your shoes, you will catch a cold.” Meng De said in a light tone. “Please return to your divine throne.”

(Xuan De!)

“Ah, ah, I... Your servant is of the same opinion.” I said something along the lines of what Meng De said and quickly bowed.

— We beseech the Emperor to take care of his health!!!

As I said so, I could hear all officials in the hall get down on their knees.

“Though I don't think it's a big deal... Hai, fine. I'll return to my throne.”

— Thanks be to your majesty!!!

These fellows... Are the real deal huh.

“Emperor, do I still have to bring the family tree out?” The eunuch from before came out and asked. Emperor Xian of Han nodded and the eunuch clapped in response, and 7 or 8 eunuchs carried the family tree in, which was in several stacks, and set it down in the main

hall.

That's a lot. But come to think of it, the Han dynasty is pretty long in the first place.

"Un, go check then."

Well, that's easy to say.

"... Hai~ Fine, I'll check." The old eunuch seemed very unwilling and unhappy as he rolled his sleeves up and began flipping through book by book.

I was still wondering why he was so unwilling. Now I know. Looks like he won't be able to find anything even if he continues checking till tomorrow.

(Why is the family tree so thick~) I asked Meng De beside me.

(I heard that Gaozu had thought of names of his descendents, supposedly all the way up to 2,000 years from then.)

Isn't he worried about repeating names...

"Liu Bei, Liu Bei (刘备)... Which one is it huh? This one? ... Doesn't seem like it, this is Liu Fen (刘奋)." The main hall was silent but for the old eunuch who was grumbling under his breath. "... Which one is it huh... Forget it, I'm not searching anymore!"

Not searching?! But...

I'd thought that the old eunuch would frantically kneel and kowtow and beg for mercy but he calmly walked to the side of the Emperor and said, "From the experience of your servant, this Liu Yu Zhou should be the King of Zhongshan, the son of the Emperor Jing of Han."

(TL: The Zhou here refers to state, and Yu Zhou is Yu state. Addressing a feudal lord or governor by [Last name] [State] was a formal and respectful way of address.)

Experience!! He actually said based on his experience!!

(As expected, that eunuch is quite the devious fellow huh. The King of Zhongshan had more than a hundred children so it's going to be hard to disprove this.)

(But didn't we all just hear his grumblings?!)

"Oh~~~ Then in that case, you're my Imperial Uncle then!"

He actually accepted it!!!

(TL: Background on King of Zhongshan – In those years, the Emperor would grant fiefs to his sons who aren't the crown prince. Feudalism was a very big thing in the Han dynasty. And yes, supposedly he was a super womaniser.)

(TL: In the original, Liu Bei was indeed said to have been descended from the King of Zhongshan but with such claims, one should always take it with a pinch of salt.)

I'm only just 17, and I'm getting called uncle already...

(Say your servant does not dare to assume that.)

"Your servant, does not dare assume that." I bowed as I said so, following Meng De's instructions.

"Don't need to be like that— Ah, Achoo~~~ Ah, sneezing sure feels nice~~"

"..."

His mucus nearly landed on my face.

"Ah, I seem to have caught a cold. *Xing*~~~ What was that again... Ah, right, Court is adjourned." Emperor Xian of Han waved his hand and then got up.

All the officials then got down on their knees which I mimicked.

As for Emperor Xian of Han, he merely waved his hand once more and left. After the Emperor left, all the officials then left quietly and orderly... I didn't think they would be so well-behaved even when leaving.

So the Emperor Xian of Han is a snotty little brat huh. I wonder if he will become better when he grows up. So I thought while I wiped the mucus that had landed on my face.

"... So, Meng De, did you invite me to Xuchang for the sake of letting me meet that (kid)?" I specially lowered my volume when mentioning the Emperor Xian of Han.

"How can that be~" Meng De laughed as she got up.

"But that is..." I was doubtful of her answer as I got up as well.

"I got you to come here solely because I wanted you to accompany me."

Ah?

"Accompany you??" I asked before I could get up fully.

"Un, nobody in Xuchang will chat with me after all." Meng De was still smiling but the smile seemed to mask a loneliness behind it.

Perhaps it's really like she said, that she just wanted company. Not only is she a woman who is above all but one, she has also shaped a villainous image of herself. It's little wonder that she has no friends.

But at the same time, I am 100% sure that it is but one reason of many. Apart from this

personal reason, Meng De definitely has more big picture considerations.

“What about your subordinates? You can chat with them right.”

“Haha, about that.” Meng De went ahead and exited the main hall, and I followed. “Because they are my subordinates, they are people who will be fighting for me. I’m afraid that if I chat with them too much, I’ll hesitate to make the right decisions on the battlefield.”

“...”

That is understandable. After all, one cannot be encumbered by personal feelings on the battlefield. But, that’s not what bothered me about her reply.

As we were talking, we had walked out of the main hall which was the most elevated part of the palace, and thus one could see the entire palace from here.

“And anyway—” Meng De looked at the palace before continuing. “Perhaps it’s a recent problem I’ve been having but I can’t quite trust others on some things.”

“Eh?” I let out a questioning grunt unwittingly.

“Yes, now the only one I can fully trust is myself.” Meng De laughed. “This has probably influenced my personality.”

Paranoia.

This is a necessary trait of Cao Cao. Nothing odd compared to the one I know. But now that I’m right in front of the anti-hero at such a time, I can’t not say anything.

“But Meng De, don’t you know?” I said softly. “By doing this, you will only isolate yourself.”

Meng De looked at me, from her expression I probably have a pained look on myself.

“I know. How can I not know?” Meng De’s smile never fell as she continued, “But when you walk alone, you can go faster right? And I’m confident in the path I choose.”

“That’s not the problem here...”

By walking alone, you can indeed travel faster but if you meet with any trouble then you have to shoulder it all alone.

“You know what’s my recent maxim?” Meng De reached out with one hand to the sky, probably to block the sun.

“I’d rather let the world betray me, than betray the world myself.”

!!

As expected, the Cao Cao before me should be like that.

— Your responsibilities will be heavy and the journey will be long.

“Though I know how you think, do the people know?” I asked a realistic question. “Won’t the people just think that you usurp and control the Han?”

“That is indeed how they think.” Meng De said as she put down her hand. “Besides, even if I try to explain myself, people’s minds can’t be changed that easily.”

“Un...”

As I looked at Meng De’s smile, I couldn’t help feeling hurt for how she must be feeling.

“Forget it. My path will have to be walked by me in the end. The things I do will be judged in the future as a part of history.” Meng De raised her head once more and her signature confident smile floated up on her face again as she walked ahead proudly.

Meng De really is strong.

I laughed helplessly and hurriedly followed her.

(TL: The actual quote is reverse. ‘I’d rather betray the world than let the world betray me!’ Cao Cao supposedly takes shelter in the home of a friend. He happened to overhear the servants sharpening their knives and asking do we tie them up first or no, and he thought they were after his life. He then killed them all only to realise they were talking about cooking.)

Chapter 15: Don't tell me this is the edict in the sleeve

TL: No Meng De this chapter, wait for the next one. Full chapter with nothing but her and MC.

“Big brother, you’re so amazing, I can’t believe you’re now part of the royal family!” Yi De immediately slapped my back and said these words of praise after I told everyone what I had seen and heard at the palace back at the inn.

“*Ke* *Ke*... I don’t think it’s a big deal actually. After all, I did see that the eunuch declared it to the Emperor because he couldn’t be bothered to search.” As I said so, I widened my eyes to let them know how obvious that eunuch was, “But for some reason, no one else saw through it and of course, neither did the Emperor.”

When I think about how his father was manipulated and used as a figurehead by the Ten Regular Attendants and He Jin, that kid’s (Emperor Xian of Han) behaviour doesn’t seem too strange.

(TL: Ten Regular Attendants were 10 eunuchs and He Jin was a general. Google to find out more, I can’t summarise all this information within 50 words or less. They won’t be featuring in the story.)

“But I didn’t think that Emperor Xian of Han was just a kid only 4 or 5 years of age.” Yun Chang nodded as she said so. “And so the fate of the world lies in that kid’s hands?”

Ah, indeed. But I must say, that kid’s mucus is really sticky. He is also definitely meant for greatness... Not.

“Since the Emperor is still young, then the one who rules over the Imperial Court is—” Feng Xian intentionally left her sentence hanging.

Feng Xian probably means Meng De.

“Though I don’t know what Meng De’s plans are, but she has her own way of doing things and I believe she has her reasons for them.” I said as I exhaled.

“But my lord,” Zhang Liao said as she walked up to me, “We should have our own way of doing things as well.”

Un? What do you mean.

“There are many ways to support the Han.” “Lord Cao Cao has her own methods but they may not be able to save the Han.” “what Zhang Liao means is that we should have our own view of things and not move according to Lord Cai Cao’s will.” The Xu state 3 explained. It really is good having the 3 of them around. Every time I have doubts, they will always explain the situation to me without me having to ask.

But my own view huh. To be honest, I really haven't been doing much thinking up till now.

"Don't worry, I have my own considerations as well of course." I gave an ambiguous answer for now, "But since we came to Xuchang, let's enjoy the security and stability and leave other thoughts aside for now."

"... To be blunt about it, I feel like we are being confined here." Yun Chang said with a sharp look in her eyes.

Confined huh, this phrase is quite appropriate for this situation. But on the other hand, we have nowhere else to go anyway.

"Maa, Meng De said she just wanted my company. In that case—"

"That's even worse!"

Before I could finish saying 'In that case, let's take as that for now', Yun Chang cut me off with raised eyebrows. Everyone else seemed to agree with her.

Looks like Yun Chang really feels that staying here for long isn't good. Though I feel that Meng De might have wanted to confine me, I am sure that she has no intention to harm me.

"Xuan De, just by looking at your expression now we know that you don't understand what Yun Chang means by that." Gan Qing, who was quietly sitting in the back all this while, suddenly pipped up. Everyone else seemed to agree as well.

"Un? I understand."

"Hai~~~ If Xuan De says this, that means you don't understand." Gan Qing sighed as she shook her head while everyone wore helpless expressions.

"Un? What is—"

"Excuse me, is the Liu Bei, Governor of Yu state here?" Just as I was about to clarify what Gan Qing was talking about, a military courier came in and interrupted.

"Un? Looking for me?" I pointed at myself as I asked, "Who is it? Is it Meng... Imperial Chancellor Cao?"

"No, the one who is seeking your presence is the State Uncle Dong Cheng."

"State Uncle!"

(TL: Dong Cheng is the father of the favourite consort of Emperor Xian of Han.)

Yun Chang and Zhang Liao seemed pretty shocked at hearing State Uncle but I have no idea what that title means.

"What is that Uncle summoning me for?"

I don't even know him, what could he want with me? Ah, it could be that he wants to get to know me and get some benefit. I am after all the Imperial Uncle now.

"I don't know. Please make your preparation. I will be your guide." As he said so, the military courier went to wait outside.

Un... Since he already invited me, might as well go."

"I'll be leaving then. If there's nothing to do, you girls can go look around the city."

"Big brother!" Just as I was about to leave, Yun Chang called me from behind.

"Ah? What is it?"

"When you meet the State Uncle, big brother must make sure to be polite and courteous and not make him feel like you are slighting him."

"... Umm, who is the State Uncle?" I couldn't help but ask when I saw Yun Chang's serious look.

"Dong Cheng—" Zhang Liao ran over and said in a small voice, "— Is the father-in-law of the Emperor Xian of Han!"

Father-in-law?

Wait! Don't tell me that little brat is married already!!

I was still wondering if he wanted to curry favour with me but now it looks like I should be the one currying favour with him.

"... Alright, I got it. I'm leaving now."

"Big brother, why don't I go with you." Yun Chang said, still worried about me.

"Eh, it will be alright. I know the basic niceties at least. I'll be going now, you all can take it easy for now." As I said so, I followed the military courier out.

Eh? Where's the military courier?! Why didn't he wait for me!! I really hate those fellows, they never bring good news and think too much of themselves.

It took me a long while before I found the military courier and make it to the State Uncle's place.

"Ah~" I sighed in relief when I neared the door.

I must say, this place really is impressive. From outside I can see many grey tile roofs. As expected of the father-in-law of the Emperor.

Dong *Dong* *Dong* I knocked softly on the big door 3 times and heard the soft sound

of footsteps coming from inside.

— *Chiyaa*, the door opened by a crack.

“Who is it.” The one who opened the door asked secretly.

I was about to just head on in when I remembered I should give my greetings first and bowed as I did so, “Liu Bei, Governor of Yu state, has come to answer an invitation. Please do notify the State Uncle.”

He thought for a bit before replying as he opened the door. “Come on in.”

I looked around the house and saw that there were quite a few people around already and they were all sitting in the courtyard. Seems like they’re waiting for me.

“Ah~~~~ Imperial Uncle Liu, I’ve been waiting for so long~~~~”

Right in the center was an old man with a long beard who got up and welcomed me in the moment he saw me.

“Yes, it’s nice to meet you...” I nodded nervously, not knowing what to say, “Umm, you must be the State Uncle right.”

“Ah, indeed I am.” The old man nodded, his face all smiles.

There were both men and women all around, and I highly doubt that any of them are small fries.

“Ah, greetings everyone. I am Liu Bei Liu Xuan De...”

“No need to introduce yourself, we’ve all seen you in Court.” Some guy that looked like a rich young master said.

“Ah, un. Yo, you’re right.” I smiled nervously.

“No need to be so uptight about things. By seniority, you are my peer.” The State Uncle saw that I was being too reserved and hurriedly got me a seat, “Putting in that way, I can be considered your older brother.

No way will I admit an old man like you as my older brother!

Though my thoughts were as such, I still had to smile at him.

“Haha, yes, yes.” Sweat dripped down my face as I did so as I kept the words which should not be said inside.

“Though your rank as an official may not be high, as a royal relative, we have pay heed to your words.” An official wearing plain clothing chipped in from the side.

What a weirdo, I can't give you anything so why are you kissing my ass?

"State Uncle, since Liu Yu Zhou has arrived, let us begin discussing the matter at hand." Just as I was tired out from having to deal with these high level officials, a clear female voice rang out and diverted attention away from me.

(TL: This guy NEEDS women to save him every time LOL!)

I looked in the direction where the voice came from and saw a formidable looking woman clad in beast hide armor sitting there drinking tea. Her shoulder length hair was curly probably because she doesn't wash it often and her sharp eyebrows were always raised. Her eyes were big but the pupils were small, and when you looked into them it felt like you were looking into the eyes of a beast.

"Un? Ah, I haven't introduced myself yet." She thought I was waiting for an introduction when she saw me staring at her and began introducing herself, "I am Ma Teng, Administrator of Xiliang. I look forward to getting along with you."

Ma Teng?! Even Ma Teng is here? If my memory is correct, she should be residing in Xiliang.

That's terribly far.

"Ah, ah, well then, let us begin." State Uncle seemed to have recalled something and took out a piece of silk from his sleeve, "A few days ago, the Emperor personally gave me an edict which I snuck out by hiding it in my sleeve. I haven't opened it yet nor have I let it leave me—Of course, this is all a secret."

State Uncle gestured for us to come up and see for ourselves and we all gathered over.

These people... Are so tall! I can't squeeze in at all.

"What!" Someone suddenly shouted.

"Softer will you, Prince! If that traitor Cao hears it, we'll be done for!"

Tr, traitor Cao!?

(TL: They actually use 曹贼 where the second word is thief or criminal but it doesn't carry across the meaning so well so I used traitor.)

"General Ma Teng, what's written on it?" I went up to Ma Teng and hoped that she could quickly tell me what was written.

"It says to assassinate Imperial Chancellor Cao." Ma Teng said with a look of dismay as she looked at the crowd.

What!

"E, Emperor Xian of Han wants us to kill Imperial Chancellor Cao." I uttered under my

breath. "But why?"

"Because Cao Cao is effectively the ruler now." State Uncle answered me. "She has the Imperial Court and the Emperor under her thumb, what place is there for us, true blooded Han royals?"

"That's right, just because that little lass saved the Emperor from Chang'an, she got so cocky."

"We'll teach her a lesson now."

Everyone slowly gathered around and affirmed State Uncle, except Ma Teng.

"Are you all idiots?" Ma Teng sat by the side and said with raised eyebrows, completely ignoring the atmosphere. "Look at this writing, how does it look like a kid's? If I had to say it, it's obvious that this edict is fake..."

"Ma Teng! I called you here today to help me, not to create a mess." State Uncle warned as his expression instantly darkened from his previous kind smile.

"... Hmph, this is stupid." Ma Teng said and made to exit the house. "Though I don't like Cao Cao, I don't like you lot even more."

"You, where are you doing?!" Someone frantically yelled.

"Don't worry, I won't tell on you lot. I'm just heading back to the inn to rest." As she said so, she walked off without looking back.

"Now that you know of it, whether you participate in it or not, you will be included in the participant name list. When the time comes, we will all face the same fate!" State Uncle threw a threat at Ma Teng who had already reached the door.

"... Whatever you want." Ma Teng said as she stared back coldly, and slammed the door behind her.

"This Ma Teng... I thought it would be easy to get her to join our side, but who knew she would be so difficult to handle..." State Uncle slammed the table in anger as he stared at the creaking door, and then turned to me. "Imperial Uncle, as a royal relative, you will be supporting us right."

... Ah, I get it now.

These people just want to pull Meng De down because they can't stand watching her consolidate more power day by day. Even if you don't think too much about it, there's no way that kid would write such words.

I looked at them, and felt very uncomfortable from the bottom of my heart. Un, as expected, I must back out of this.

As I finished gathering my thoughts, I opened my mouth to refuse. "I—"

"No need for words Imperial Uncle, we've already written your name for you." As he said so, he didn't even wait to listen to me and wrote my name in a roster.

"No, I—"

"Pay the dues, 5 silver taels."

You're collecting money for this!!

"I, I don't have money."

(TL: My women, who are the ones with money, aren't here.)

"Then we'll put it on your tab." As he said so, he made a mark on the roster. "Al right everyone, disperse."

"No, what I mean is—"

Everyone seemed to have had an agreement to leave quickly and stealthily as they did not bother to listen to me at all. In a short time, I was the only one left in the main hall with State Uncle.

"..." What the heck is this huh~

"Ah, Imperial Uncle, you can take it easy. I have a banquet to go to this afternoon so I'll be leaving now." As he said so, State Uncle left as well.

Alright, now it's just me. Even if I steal something now no one will see but I won't do something like that of course.

But!! Don't tell me it's all decided already, I haven't even agreed!!!

Hai~~~~ Forget it, I'll tell them properly next time.

But back then I didn't know, that after this one-sided communication, I would never speak with them again.

(TL: In the original, Liu Bei and Ma Teng both participated in the conspiracy but the Emperor did indeed write it. I always thought Liu Bei was quite the dick to do so when Cao Cao took him at what was possibly his lowest point.)

Chapter 16: Don't tell me that the discussion of heroes over wine is the last chapter of volume 2

TL: Last chapter of the main story for volume 2! Next is a 5-10 part extra story for volume 2. As I've said before, this is genuinely a plot driven story. Up till now it has really just been a prologue and things will start heating up and the later we go, there will be more differences from the original. From now on, I'll also translate some author Q&As.

Reader: I really hope that Xuan De and Meng De end up together in the end.

Author: I hope so too but who knows (Shrugs)

Hu, I finally made it out.

But! I didn't agree to what they wanted to do!! Assassinating Meng De! How can I do such a thing?

Un... Should I tell Meng De?

But if I do that, then those people will... I don't know how Meng De will deal with them.

Such a pain! If I knew it would be like this, I wouldn't have gone, or maybe let Yun Chang come along— No that might be even worse.

But leaving that aside, from what I've seen in Xuchang so far, I feel that this does seem like an appropriate place to be the new capital.

People are leading safe and prosperous lives, business is thriving, though I don't know if there are thieves about but I haven't met with any yet.

I've had to go to Court early in the morning after shortly arriving here. After that, before I could even rest in the inn, I got called to meet the State Uncle by that military courier and had to listen to that bullshit. As I looked up to the sky, I saw that it was already noon now.

Hai, I'm starting to realise that I haven't been able to have breakfast lately, and even lunch has been becoming a sporadic affair as well.

Un? Wait... I happen to have some free time now, and Yun Chang and the rest should be out for lunch too, so now should be the perfect time for me to try out the local cuisines alone. I happen to have some money in my purse too.

As I thought so, I went to feel for my purse.

...

Eh? Where's my purse? Damn it!! I've been robbed!! And I was just praising this place.

“Hai~ No choice but to return to the inn first.” I sighed as I accepted my fate and headed in the direction for the inn. Looks like I’m going to be scolded by Mi Zhu again.

(TL: He really is a kept man... Being given an allowance lol.)

“Yo, Xuan De, why’re you here?”

“Un?” I looked tiredly over and got a shock.

“Meng De?!” As I turned around, I saw the very person we had been talking about. This isn’t good.

“Xuan De, you haven’t been back to the inn? Un... Ah, you came out to have lunch right?” Meng De nodded.

“Ah, ah, Yes. That’s it.”

“Un? What’s wrong, why are you so nervous?”

“Am I?”

I’m suffering from a guilty conscience of being witness, though not accomplice, to and being included in the ‘Cao Cao Assassination Group’. I cannot even look Meng De in the eye now.

“Maa, not that it matters.”

“Hu~” I heaved a sigh of relief as Meng De did not pursue the matter.

“Let’s go.”

“Ah? Where to?”

“Isn’t it obvious?” Meng said as she pointed to a row of shops. “Lunch, my treat.”

(TL: MC just makes girls want to take care of him and feed him lol.)

I followed Meng De into a restaurant and couldn’t help but to say the matter I was met with earlier. — Not the matter with State Uncle, but the one where I was robbed.

“Is that so, so Xuan De was robbed huh.” Meng De laughed after hearing my grievances. “But that thief really has a good eye huh, to be able to tell in an instant that you’re like a block of wood.”

“I’m human okay?”

Hai~ I was already down to begin with and was hoping to get a good meal and lighten up but who knew that I’d lost my money.

As I looked at Meng De, my mood continued to get worse.

“Ah, Meng De, I think I’ll go back first, I feel bad about having you splurge on me.”

If you have free time to eat with me, why not solve the crime issue here. And moreover, having a girl treat me is...

“Aiya, don’t be so reserved.” Meng De waved at the me who was getting up and bade me to sit down, “No matter what, I’m an Imperial Chancellor already.”

“...”

Honestly, I have some words that I really can’t say.

“Un? Could you be thinking ‘To think an Imperial Chancellor would be eating lunch at a third rate street restaurant’, or something like that.”

I frantically shook my head.

“Pu, looking at your reaction, you’re definitely thinking something like that.” Meng De broke out in laughter as she looked at me.

“...” I didn’t think that my expression would be read do easily.

“I have a reason for eating here.” Meng De said as she pointed at the restaurant’s sign that said ‘Bronze Cauldron’.

What does it mean?

“Ah, it’s served.” Meng De said, her tone filled with elation.

“Ah... Isn’t this...” What was served was not just a bronze cauldron, but a heap of fresh ingredients and 2 plates of some kind of sauce.

“I’m guessing you’ve never eaten this before. I chanced upon this stall and was pleasantly surprised by how it tasted.” Meng De said as she took a piece of vegetable and stirred it in the bronze cauldron before taking it out and dipping it sauce, and finally putting it in her mouth gently. “Un!~~~ This is it! Xuan De, you should try it too.”

“Ah, ah.” I nodded.

Isn’t this just shabu-shabu!!

(TL: I have no idea what the English name is for shabu-shabu. It’s not hotpot, that’s a general term.)

I wanted to throw a tsukkomi but I remembered the era I was in and held it back. But that wasn’t all, I had to act like I’ve never eaten or seen this before too.

“... Meng De, do you see this dish often around here?”

“No, this should be the only one in all of Central Plains.” Meng De said as she ate, “Thinking about it another way, perhaps the people aren’t used to eating like this. I like it though. And since the weather has begun to become colder, we should eat something hot. Look, there’s even heat rising from the fire below.”

Indeed, if there’s no heat, it wouldn’t be called hotpot.

(TL: Raw – There’s even a fire below (with no reference to steam). The wordplay was in the term 火锅 which is hotpot in Mandarin.)

I gave a helpless smile as I started picking up food and stirring it in the cauldron. As I ate, I couldn’t help but be amazed at the long history of Chinese cuisine.

I really didn’t think that there were hotpots in this era. I guess this can be considered a blessing.

“Boss, warm a flask wine for us!”

“... Pu!” I couldn’t help but laugh when I saw Meng De’s expression.

“Ah? What’s the matter?” Meng De frantically wiped her mouth when she saw me laughing at her and asked. “Do I have some sauce on my face?”

“No no no, I was just laughing at how you spoke and ate just now. You look just like Yi De when I first met her.”

Back then, Yi De was also shouting like that and then I was pulled onto the tracks of the true history.

True... Haha, is this really true though? I wanted to laugh at the ridiculousness of my thoughts.

“Hou hou~~~ Lord Zhang Fei is it? Looks like you all have quite a good relationship huh.”

“Of course, she’s my little sister after all.” I looked at Meng De as I ate, “Ah, speaking of which Meng De...”

“Ah? What is it this time?”

“You have sauce on your nose.”

“Eh!!” Meng De hurriedly turned around and wiped her nose with her clothes, not caring if they got stained.



Haha, Meng De has a cute side to her huh.

“The wine for you 2 has been warmed.” The xiaoer brought over 2 bowls of wine on a wooden tray and set them on the table.

I hope Meng De has a good drinking capacity.

Meng De sip her wine refinedly, without a ‘ha~~’ or ‘good’ after she swallowed.

Looks like she’s okay or maybe the alcohol isn’t too much. Let me try—

Shiku~

“So strong!” *Ke* *Ke* *Ke*

I grabbed my throat with both arms and stuck my tongue out like a puppy.

“Un? Xuan De hasn’t drank the wine in Xuchang yet? The wine here is famous for its strength.” Meng De drank her wine nonchalantly as she looked at me.

Meng De’s drinking capacity is not just good, it’s seriously good. She probably trained it up from her long time in the Central Plains. As expected, hard liquor is a bit too much for me.

“Right,” Meng De spoke after her second cup of wine, “Xuan De, who do you think is able to prop up the Han?”

All of a sudden, Meng De who was just drinking a moment ago threw out a curveball at me.

“Eh? Prop up the Han? Ah...”

‘Isn’t that you?’

Though I wanted to reply her with that, I should probably abide by social niceties and suggest someone else.

“Ah... What about Yuan Shao in the north? She has a high official rank, a strong army and rich lands. If she wants to prop up the Han, I’m sure she can do it.”

Of course, that is if she wants to.

“Ben Chu huh... Indeed, with her power, propping up the Han shouldn’t be an issue.” Meng De said as she took a bite of vegetables, “But I’ll eventually consume all the power she has so she doesn’t count.”

... You actually said such aggressive words in a direct manner. It’s almost as if she is waiting for me to say ‘It’s you Meng De.’

“Then the only one left is you, Meng De.” I submitted my answer script, without any inhibitions.

Honestly, there really isn’t much point to that question. Who else could there be besides Meng De?

“Un...” Meng De nodded slowly then shook her head and said, “No, there is one other person.”

“Ah? Who?” I said as I took more vegetables and stirred them in the cauldron, not really paying attention.

“That person,” Though it could be me thinking too much, but it really seemed like Meng De

was looking at me with a look at admiration as she said so, "... Is you."

Ah?

"I— Hot!!!!" I placed the vegetable in my mouth and got a shock from it being too hot and dropped the vegetable as well as the chopsticks.

I'd forgotten while talking with Meng De that I'm bad with hot food.

"Xiaoer, get me a new pair of chopsticks." I hollered toward the inside of the stall as I picked up the chopsticks from the floor and turned to Meng De and said, "You think that the other person who can prop up the Han is me?"

Meng De nodded.

Maa, that is indeed true since I am Liu Bei after all, though I myself do not have such lofty ambitions.

"Un, since you said it, then I guess I'm good as well."

"Oi, what kind of reply is that, you're clearly patronising me." Meng De said unhappily.

"No, I mean what I said." I didn't have any mood to argue and so I just gave a reply so she wouldn't think that way.

"In that case, you're my rival then." Meng De probably has some hidden meaning behind those words.

But I can't read them of course.

"..." After Meng De said that, I could only ask, "So?"

"So," Meng De said, and walked right up to my side before continuing, "Why not come and work for me."

Eh!?

She suddenly came up close and whispered in my ear, so I heard her loud and clear but at the same time I could feel my face getting red hot. as I got so nervous that the chopsticks I had just picked up fell to the ground once more.

Where did that invitation come from.

Though I hoped very much that Meng De was just joking, I could tell from her expression that she was dead serious.

"Wh, when did you..."

"I've wanted you as a subordinate for a while now." Meng De smiled as she interrupted the

flustered me. For some reason, the smile this time seemed especially captivating. "I have political reasons, and personal reasons, for doing so."

"But, even if Meng De says that..."

"It's nothing, no need to rush. Think it over think it over." Meng De returned to her seat after she was finished and then resumed eating.

Though my chopsticks were moving, I wasn't thinking about eating at all and was considering 2 matters.

One was the edict in the sleeve, another was what Meng De just told me.

As I continued to think, I could no longer taste anything I ate from the hotpot but still continued eating anyway to stave off hunger.

"How was it? Not only was this meal delicious, it's also inexpensive."

"Un, indeed."

All things considered, being able to have a nice hotpot in the era of the Three Kingdoms is very wonderful indeed.

And it's about time I made a decision about what Meng De said. This is, after all, my own path.

While I'm still in this era, as long as I have not returned to the future, I'm Liu Bei.

Un.

"Meng De."

After we finished eating, I stopped Meng De just as she was about to leave.

"Un?"

"Though I feel bad about it, I won't be joining you as your subordinate." I said with all seriousness.

"Is that so. I thought so too."

"Eh? You thought so too?"

"That's right. I felt that you wouldn't join me but I just asked anyway." Meng De seemed to have known what my reply was and merely smiled without a shred of surprise or shock, "Perhaps some day we may meet on the battlefield as opposing sides."

I smiled in response, as that was, after all, the fate that awaits Liu Bei and Cao Cao.

But for some reason, I hoped that such a hateful scene would never come to pass.

“Un,” Of course, I feel that Liu Bei and Cao Cao’s relationship is not limited to the battlefield. “Even if that comes to pass, we will still be friends.”

“Friends... Huh.” Meng De said discontentedly and then began uttering under her breath, “The very reason why I wanted you under my command was so that we wouldn’t stop at being just friends...”

“Eh?”

What did Meng De just say?

“Un... As expected I can’t be too hasty and rush things.”

“Don’t leave me hanging...”

Now I was getting nervous.

“No, it’s nothing.” Meng De shook her head, “In any case, just rest for now. If there’s anything, I’ll come and find you.”

“Un, I’ll go and collect my salary as Governor of Yu state sometime over the next few days.”

Though I don’t know yet how much I can collect.

After that, I parted ways with Meng De. Nothing big happened for the next few days, not even with the State Uncle and his faction.

But peace in a time of chaos is something that goes against logic and so this day, something happened.

Yuan Shu declared herself Emperor.

(TL: I’m using the term Emperor here for 2 reasons. First, Wu Zetian is also called Emperor for the period when she officially took the role. Second, in Mandarin, the term 皇帝 is actually gender neutral but since there has never been a female monarch except Wu Zetian, it has male connotations.)

(TL: This scene is actually a brilliant remake of the original. In the original, Liu Bei had started gardening to throw off Cao Cao’s suspicions after he joined Dong Cheng’s conspiracy. After a few days, Cao Cao invited him for wine and Liu Bei thought that Cao Cao suspected him. But Cao Cao only wanted to invite him for wine and the conversation they had was similar to the one here.)

Extra Story: Don't tell me this is a Yaminabe special chapter

Part 1

As the Governor of Yu state, just like in Xu state, it's not like I have nothing to do. And the story this time begins from a certain Court session.

"Hai~~~ The food is getting worse and worse these days. Stupid eunuch, have you all been embezzling the food budget huh?" Emperor Xian of Han said as he sat lazily in the main hall, with one leg propped up on a eunuch nearby. And as he irritably complains about his private life, he unwittingly reveals a shady side of the goings-on in the palace.

"N, no I haven't... I, It's just your misconception." The old eunuch's frantic denial told us all we needed to know.

"Un, since you said so then I won't pursue this further."

... And as usual, Emperor Xian of Han lets it go just like that.

"But really, your meals have only been unpalatable for a few days so please bear with it for now your majesty." State Uncle, who was kneeling in the first row, said.

Though he was kneeling, to be able to say such rude words show his true position in the Imperial Court.

—- Please bear with it your majesty!

... Looks like everyone's a fan of State Uncle.

These fellows really don't think much of the Emperor huh... Though I too am like them in this regard.

But thinking about it another way, he is the Emperor after all. As the Son of Heaven, his quality of life should generally be better and if he is unsatisfied with anything, it's not like he can't raise the issue but does he have to do it during Court? It's doing things like this that diminish the majesty and reputation of Emperor Xian of Han.

"Your majesty, I will think of a way to resolve the matter of your meals."

Just as Emperor Xian of Han was at a loss as to how to respond to the officials, Meng De saluted and kowtowed after flicking her dress with a serious expression as she proposed to seek a solution. As expected of Meng De, she will always fearlessly stand out at these times.

Over these few days, I have been privy to the fiscal situation of the country and learnt that it was not that tax revenue was insufficient. Rather, it was because of the many layers of officials in the bureaucracy who siphon off a bit at every stage before taxes reach the treasury.

"Un, as expected, the Imperial Chancellor is the one who truly understands." Emperor Xian of Han nodded as he grabbed onto the lifeline that Meng De had given him. "Then I'll leave

the matter of improving my meals to you.”

“Your servant hears and obeys.” Meng De kowtowed once more.

Hai~~~ Though Meng De is doing this out of goodwill for the Emperor, I’m sure that the Finance Ministry won’t give Meng De any additional money for this.

“The next matter is... Fan Chou in Chang’an... Ah, how do you read this?” Emperor Xian of Han read falteringly from a scroll he picked up from the console table after moving on from the matter of his meals. “Ah... What do we do about this huh?!”

(TL: Fan Chou is a subordinate general of Dong Zhuo.)

How are we supposed to know what to do when we don’t know what’s going on and you have not finished reading yet?

“Your servant has already made the necessary arrangements to resolve this.” Meng De said seriously once more. “I have already sent 30,000 troops to suppress Chang’an. If nothing goes wrong, then we should be able to hear some good news by this afternoon.”

“Though I don’t know how many 30,000 is, but good! ... Ah...” Emperor Xian of Han looked the dozen odd scrolls on the console table that needed to be addressed and rubbed his creased eyebrows before— “Court is adjourned!”

You’re just giving up!!

Of course, I didn’t tsukkomi out loud.

Emperor Xian of Han got up exaggeratedly and didn’t even look at us before leaving, after which the officials slowly got up.

“Hai, my back hurts from kneeling so much... And my butt as well.” I got up with great difficulty and felt like if I had to kneel for another half hour, my legs probably wouldn’t be able to carry me out.

“Maa, that can’t be helped. When I first started being an official, it was like that too. It gets better as time goes on.” Meng De said, probably to console me.

But I really don’t want to spend the rest of my life kneeling here. Leaving aside whether I make it back to my time or not, I can’t possibly waste my precious time here.

“Speaking of which, Meng De, why did you propose to be the one to improve the Emperor’s meals? That should be under the purview of the palace administration right.”

“Maa, I didn’t plan to at first, since taking care of even that would be a bit too much.” Meng De laughed dryly and stretched her back.

“But Xuan De, have you thought about the issue at hand?” Meng De’s expression became serious instantly and she looked at me in the eye while a bead of sweat streamed down her

face.

“Wh, what is it?” I wanted to back off but I was caught by Meng De’s gaze and could neither look away nor leave.

“You’ve seen how Emperor Xian of Han is like. Can you imagine how he would be when he grows up, and due to a lack of nutrition, is as... Innocent as he is now?”

... I know, Meng De, you wanted to say dumb just now right.

“Now that you mentioned it, that is indeed a concern.” I finally understood how dire the situation was, and where Meng De was coming from when she made that decision.

“Right?!”

... But I feel like Meng De is more like a babysitter for Emperor Xian of Han. Though it is as Meng De said, it would be terrible if that kid becomes even dumber from a lack of nutrition.

“But Meng De, what are your plans?” I said as I looked at her. “You don’t have a budget for this, so how will you improve his meals? Are you going to pay out of your pocket every time and buy food from restaurants for him every meal?”

“No, I have my own plans of course, how could I possibly pay out of my pocket?”

“Then you’re...”

“Un, I have my own ideas.” Meng De cut me off with an ambiguous reply. “Ah, right, bring your subordinates to my house tonight.”

“Please don’t call them subordinates, it feels weird to me.” Calling them companions is so much better. “But why this all of a sudden?”

“Nothing much, I just wanted to invite you all over to my place for dinner.” Meng De blinked as she said so. “When the time comes, I’ll also tell you how I intend to solve the problem of the Emperor’s meals.”

“Haa... I got it.”

But why do you have to make it seem so mysterious?

“Also, don’t forget to get everyone to bring some ingredients of their own. It will come to good use then.” Meng De said before she left.

Ingredients?

... I think I know what we’re going to eat.

“Dinner at Meng De’s place?”

“Un, with everyone she said.” I replied to Yun Chang. “And she also said to not forget to bring ingredients.”

“Ingredients? Could it be that we’re going to cook there ourselves?” Zhang Liao said as she sat in the corner of the room. Seems like she always puts herself in places that are generally out of sight.

“Though there is that possibility, I don’t think so.” In my mind, I could see what it would be like already. “Cheer up everyone, we might be able to try something we haven’t eaten before.”

—- Oh~~~

“We’re really looking forward to it, right Red Hare.” *Wang*! Even Feng Xian had an excited smile on her.

“Feng Xian, you can bring it along, but don’t let it go onto the table.”

(TL: Imagine if someone accidentally dips it in LOL)

“Un.” Feng Xian wore an expression that looked like a child whose parents have agreed to buy a toy for.

It was obvious that everyone was eagerly anticipating tonight’s dinner, and was guessing what it could be.

“About the ingredients.” “Did Lord Cao Cao give any specifications?” “Or can we bring anything?”

“Un, bring anything you want. Of course, the more premium they are, the better.”

Honestly, I was hoping that someone would bring some cooked food over.

“Premium?” “Looks like we’ll have to spend quite a bit.” “Maa, we’ll just have to pick something with higher purity.”

... What were these 3 talking about again?

“But since we’ve already decided then let’s go prepare.” Yi De said as she raised a hand, and then yelled out, “Oh!~~~”

—- Oh!~~~ Everyone, including me, followed her cheer.

Indeed, apart from Court, life in Xuchang is really relaxed, bland even, so perhaps Meng De’s invitation is to give us a little colour in our lives.

Although it’s just a meal.

"Is it a hotpot as expected?" I said softly.

As predicted, it is indeed a hotpot.

It was now evening, and we had made our way to Meng De's place with our ingredients. The moment we stepped in, we saw a bronze cauldron in the middle of the main hall which made me think that 'Ah, Meng De really likes this huh'.

"Oh, Xuan De, you're all here already huh. Our side is all seated here too."

"Un? Your side is..." I looked behind Meng De after she said so—

Indeed, they're all here. Xu Chu, Dian Wei, Li Dian, Yue Jin, Xiahou Dun, Xiahou Yuan... Looks like we've met them all before. They were all seated in the main hall and saluted us as we entered, which we returned in kind.

"But looks like Meng De is planning on treating us to this as expected huh." I said as I gestured toward the bronze cauldron in the main hall with my chin.

"That's right, letting everyone try this helps to promote it as well. As for this bronze cauldron, I specially borrowed it from that restaurant." Meng De always seemed so excited when it came to hotpots. "In any case, don't just stand there and come on in."

"Alright, let's go in then." I replied and bade everyone to enter.

As everyone happily made their way into the main hall, Meng De seemed to have thought of something all of a sudden and called out to us. "Ah, that's right, don't bring out your ingredients yet."

"Un? Why?" Yi De asked.

"Honestly, I don't know myself. It's what my Feng Xiao told me to say." Meng De said with a helpless smile.

Though nobody could understand Feng Xiao's intentions, everyone was unperturbed by this and happily accepted Meng De's request as they stuffed their ingredients back in their bags and walked into the main hall.

Feng Xiao? Guo Jia is it? I didn't think he, no, maybe it's her, would be here.

"So Lord Guo Jia is here today then. But why does it seem like Lord Guo Jia isn't around here..." I asked Meng De as I stood outside the main hall.

I looked around the main hall, but couldn't find anyone who I hadn't met before.

"If you're talking about Feng Xiao... She's behind you now."

"Hello..."

“Waa!!!”

A frail voice that sounded like that of a ghost came from behind me, along with a wave of cold wind that blew onto my neck, made me scream out in shock.

“Xuan De? Are you alright?” Only after hearing Meng De call out to me did I return to my senses and turn back to take a look. Indeed, there was a lifeless looking girl with long black hair standing straight right behind me even though no one was there before.

“... So mean.” She said, in the same ghastly, floating tone from before.

Yo, you’re the mean one okay? That seriously scared me.

“Introduce yourself, Feng Xiao.” Meng De said, and Guo Jia walked out from the dark corner.

“I’m Guo Jia Guo Feng Xiao. As you can see, I’m a living dead person.” She said as she reached out her hand.

She actually called herself a living dead person... This era should not have any zombie movies, and naturally no Jiangshi in official uniforms like in the Qing dynasty.

(TL: I didn’t translate Jiangshi as they are a pretty unique existence that is both zombie and vampire as defined in the Western context. You will know if you ever saw any horror B-movies from Hong Kong, China or Taiwan that involves them. In any case, Guo Jia is 100% human, she’s just exaggerating.)

“Ah, hello. I’m Liu Bei Liu Xuan De.” I reached out and shook her hand, and found that Guo Jia’s hand was hard and cold like an ice bag.

“Un...” Her smile gave me an ominous feeling and even made all my hair stand on end, so much so I retracted my hand instinctively.

I carefully sized up Guo Jia. She was wearing a plain white dress, the sort that people usually wore to sleep. Her bangs were long at the side and covered part of her eyes such that only half of each of her 2 dead looking eyes could be seen. Her head was always tilted slightly upwards as though her neck was tired, and her face had an unhealthy pallor. There were also several strands of hair that left her bangs which she was biting on. All in all, she gave me a gloomy and dark impression.

And...

“U, umm, aren’t you going to wipe the blood at the corner of your mouth?”

And she had some dried blood at the corner of her mouth.

“Un? ... Ah, no I’m not... If I wipe it off, it will only keep flowing...”

... The pretty girl smiled charmingly, but I must say she keeps giving me the sort of vibes that

you feel when watching horror movies.

“Maa, it’s just a small matter, so don’t mind it so much.” Meng De said as she patted my and Guo Jia’s backs... Speaking of which, Meng Dr, can you stop patting?! Miss Guo Jia is spewing blood!!

“Th, then let’s make our way in.” I said as I smiled rigidly, trying my best not to think too deeply about what just happened.

“Un, let’s go, everyone’s waiting for us.” Meng De replied and then turned to Guo Jia, “Tell everyone about the rules of the game we thought of in a while.”

“... Un.”

Guo Jia’s smile in response to Meng De made me feel a primal fear that permeated my entire body and shook my very core. as I was filled with an ominous feeling for what was to come.

However, the story of this night, was just about to begin.

Part 2

“First, let me propose a toast for everyone’s presence today~~”

After everyone took a seat, Meng De, as the host and organiser, stood up first and proposed the first drink to which everyone answered.

We were all seated around a large round table with a bronze cauldron twice as large as the one in the restaurant set in the middle.

And Meng De now, had a smile on her that felt like it came from the bottom of her heart and was also more fitting of a girl like her. Meng De was exceptionally happy today, probably because days like these are probably rare for her.

Indeed, I too feel that it’s good to have a meal with everyone like this.

“Now then, let me explain how to eat using this bronze cauldron.” Meng De said as she put down her cup and picked up her chopsticks. “It’s actually quite simple. We just put the food in the cauldron, stir it inside until it’s cooked, then bring it out and dip it in sauce, and then it’s done.”

Ahen— A look of sheer bliss appeared on Meng De’s face as she chewed on the piece of vegetable she had used for the demonstration.

Oh~~~~

Everyone seemed to be very surprised at this method of eating. At this, I finally realised the novelty of hotpot in this era, for everyone to think that this method of eating is something completely new.

Although, just 2 days ago, when I ate the hotpot with Meng De, I had keenly felt it already. The sauce itself was quite different from what I was used to. I can’t tell what’s in it but it has a much stronger taste and a more delicious smell than sauce in the 21st century.

“What are we waiting for then? Let’s bring out our ingredients and stir them quick.” Yi De asked, eager to bring out her ingredients.

“... Please wait.” Guo Jia, who was sitting beside Meng De, stopped Yi De, who shivered at the sound of Guo Jia’s ghastly voice, “It isn’t easy to gather everyone together like this so just plainly eating is a little boring.”

“Spectral Strategist, what do you mean...” Xiahou Yuan, who sat to the left of Guo Jia, asked with great interest.

“Un,” She then turned to several servants in the hallway. “Bring me several of the lampshades that I painted black.”

The servants left immediately on hearing Guo Jia’s instructions.

Eh? What does that mean?

“Lampshade?”

“Painted black?”

Xiahou Yuan and Zhang Liao asked, not understanding what was going on. Feng Xian, Yun Chang and Xiahou Dun sat there in silence, but from their expressions, they were suspicious of what was to come. Li Dian, Yue Jin and the Xu state 3 were calm while Xu Chu, Dian Wei, Yi De and Hua Tuo had a look like they were bored already. Gan Qing was busy taking care of Mi Zhen.

“... Un, let me explain.” Guo Jia seemed to have enjoyed seeing our troubled looks as we could not understand what was going on, and stayed silent until the lampshades were brought out. “In a while, I’ll get the servants to cover all the lamps with these, and when there’s only moonlight in the main hall, we shall take our ingredients noiselessly and put them into the bronze cauldron.”

“But what’s the need for all this? And why do we have to hide our ingredients from being seen by others?” Yun Chang asked. Seems like something struck a raw nerve of her’s.

I looked at Meng De, but she shook her head when she saw me look at her. Seems like Guo Jia did not tell her anything beforehand either.

Un...

“And so,” Xiahou Dun folded her arms across her chest as she said in a very calm and nonchalant voice. “What does this have to do with our dinner?”

“... Please be patient, General Xiahou and General Guan Yu.” Guo Jia said with cold eyes that looked straight ahead. “In a while, we will cover the lamps, and then everyone will put their ingredients into the cauldron in the darkness. This way, no one will know who put in what, so won’t it be interesting if we make it such that everyone has to eat whatever they take out?”

“Understood.”

“So that is to say, everyone will eat what everyone brought, and luck will solve the problem of picky eaters.”

Everyone nodded at Guo Jia’s explanation. But speaking of which, isn’t this yaminabe?

“Of course, since it’s a game, there will be penalties.” Guo Jia nodded, and brought out a large cloth bag. “What I have here is a bag of chilli from Szechuan, which I will be putting into the cauldron. When someone picks it and cannot take the spiciness, just shout ‘out’ and you will be forfeited from the game and can go to a room in the back where you can eat a normal food from a bronze cauldron.”

Anyone have any objections? After explaining the rules, Guo Jia used her eyes to ask this

question as she looked at everyone.

“Speaking of which, everything...” I said as I looked at the bag. It really was frighteningly large, and I wonder what my odds are at picking something besides chilli.

“Un, don’t worry, it’s not spicy.” Guo Jia said calmly, but she didn’t look at me as she said so.

... Though I don’t know how it looks from Guo Jia’s point of view, from what I see, less than half of the people here seem willing to continue with this game.

“Wait,” Hua Tuo’s tiredness seem to have passed as she asked while raising her hand, “Since it’s a game, if there are penalties, then there should be rewards right.”

“Un... That’s right. My lord, what do you think?” Guo Jia seemed to have only considered about the penalty of chillies but not about rewards.

“Why don’t we give a special right to the person who stays until the end.” Meng De had a face that seemed like she thought of a good idea. “The one who wins can order someone here to do one thing.”

—- No objections~~~

Eh? Eh? Why is everyone agreeing with a bright gleam in their eyes the moment they heard the reward? They seem so eager to begin the game that they look like completely different people from before.

“Then—” Guo Jia waved her hand at the servants who covered the lamps.

Ah, it really is dark. In ancient times where there is no electricity, the night is usually very dark since light from fire alone is difficult to light up the surroundings. In eras like this, moonlight is a great help.

Using the moonlight that shone into the main hall, I put in all the ingredients I brought into the cauldron.

By the way, what I brought was tofu, and not a lot either, so I just dumped them all in.

“Ah, it’s hot!”

“Little sister, you have to be careful that you don’t touch the cauldron.”

Seems like I heard Yi De and Yun Chang’s voices... Hai, Yi De is still a kid as expected huh.

“I can’t reach~~~”

“Let me help you, pass me your plate.”

This time it was Gan Qing and Mi Zhen. But a plate? Was that what they used to carry the ingredients?

“Big sis, I can’t see anything, I think I have a bit of nightblindness.”

“I’m not complaining even when I only have one eye. Deal with it yourself! ... Where is this... Ah, hot!!”

“Umm, Lord Cao Cao.” “Can we put the ingredients inside?” “Un, we feel like we had a misunderstanding since the very beginning.”

“Since you said they are ingredients, then just put them in.”

Everyone seems to be really unsure of what they’re doing... Eh? Come to think of it, seems like I’m the only guy here today.

“Un, has everyone put everything in?” Guo Jia asked, as she probably felt that there was not much time left, and everyone affirmed it before– “Alright, take off the lampshades.”

After the lampshades were taken off, the main hall was once again lit up.

I looked at the insides of the cauldron curiously. It was a clear soup before but now it had become a brownish red.

... Oi oi oi, this colour doesn’t feel right yo.

The soup had also become very cloudy, and the bottom couldn’t be seen, much less what everyone had put in.

“Eh, what is this?”

“Wu...”

“My appetite has completely disappeared.” “I don’t even have the courage to reach out with my chopsticks anymore.” “B, but to retreat just because of the colour is way too shameful right.”

I looked at everyone, and just as predicted, not a single person was able to maintain their composure at this sight,

“Alright, let’s begin picking.” Guo Jia, however, seemed unperturbed as she continued. “Because there are quite a few people here, so we shall do this one by one. — Let’s begin from General Xiahou Dun.”

“Wu...” Xiahou Dun was visibly scared.

Ah, let me explain the order. In reverse clockwise order is– Xiahou Dun, Xiahou Yuan, Xu Chu, Dian Wei, Li Dian, Yue Jin, Zhang Liao, Feng Xian, Gan Qing (Gan Qing and Mi Zhen are considered one group together), Zi Zhong, Gong You, Xiao Yong, Hua Tuo, Yao De, Yun Chang, me, Meng De. By the way, Guo Jia herself is not participating.

Ah~~~ There really are quite a lot of people huh. I wonder when this game will end.

“Oh~~~ Big sister, you won a prize!!” Just as I was deep in my thoughts, Xiahou Yuan said gleefully.

I looked over and saw that Xiahou Dun had a terrible look and sweat was streaming down her face as she held a small red chilli in her chopsticks.

Xiahou Dun really is unlucky. I didn't think someone would get it so quick.

“N, no problem! A chilli like this won't stop the me who wants to make fun of my little sister.” As she said so, she popped the chilli in her mouth just like that.

... Looks like she planned on making fun of Xiahou Yuan after she won. Maa, since she's usually made fun of by her little sister, perhaps it's time for payback.

But what Xiahou Dun said was indeed correct. How could a mere chilli render someone helpless—

“Ah!!!!!!!!!!!!”

Xiahou Dun instantly yelled out and her face turned red completely while her pupils shrank before she collapsed onto the table shortly.

“Sis, big sister.” Xiahou Yuan absentmindedly called out to Xiahou Dun, to which there was no response.

“Alright, Xiahou Dun is out.” Guo Jia said as she got the servants to carry Xiahou Dun out.

Everyone was terrified by this scene.

— No way, one down just like that.

“Oi oi oi oi oi! I, is this some sort of lethal poison?” Zhang Liao protested as she slammed the table with a look of disbelief.

“... Why? Can't play?” Guo Jia opened her mouth as she did so, revealing a horrific smile. Coupled with the trail of blood at the edge of her mouth, the level of fear induced by that smile is truly unbearable.

“Wu...” With just those few words, Zhang Liao was silenced. Feng Xian, who sat beside her, pulled her sleeve and only then did Zhang Liao sit back down.

(Meng De, now what?) I whispered to Meng De, who was also sweating as she looked on.

(No way out. When Guo Jia has decided something, even I can't change it.)

“Let's continue then.” Guo Jia said.

Then, next is Xiahou Yuan.

"I, it's me then, haha." Xiahou Yuan forced a laugh as she raised her chopsticks and dipped them into the cauldron—

— This seems like... Fried egg?

Wait, why would someone put fried egg inside?

"Maa, maa, as long as it's not chilli, anything is good."

That's true, at least one can survive.

"Ah, I made that." Mi Zhen, who was sitting opposite, happily yelled out. "I made it with big sister Gan!"

!!

No good!

"General Xiahou Yuan, please don't—"

"Kuha!~~~ Ah~~~"

Before I could finish, General Xiahou Yuan was already gripping her neck with both hands before collapsing with her eyes rolled backwards.

"Alright, Xiahou Yuan is out."

(TL: Well, you guys should know what happened after v2c7 now.)

The little sister was carried out just like her older sister.

"Wh, what is this!" Xu Chu, who was besides Xiahou Yuan, frantically asked Mi Zhen.

"I, I made it according to how big sister Hua Tuo taught me to~" Mi Zhen seemed to have been frightened by Xu Chu and dove into Gan Qing's arms.

"A-re? If you made it according to what I taught you, then it should be alright." Hua Tuo said with a doubtful expression.

Alright, maybe the method is correct, but pleast make them try it first next time.

... But, could this mean that—

When I thought about this, I couldn't help but take a deep breath as I whispered to Yun Chang beside me. "Yun Chang, what did you put into the cauldron?"

"... Ah, nothing much." Yun Chang, stop fidgeting at this time. "Just some beef stew I made myself. Gan Qing and the rest seem to have made something as well."

"Why did you all bring cooked food for?!"

“But I didn’t know that they were to be put into the cauldron.” Yun Chang retorted. I began to regret being ambiguous at the start.

The breath of cold air I had breathed in had now reached my stomach from fear. Beads of cold sweat dripped onto the table and the floor.

2 up, 2 out. This death ratio, the price for the reward and the amount of killer food is way too high.

But I know, the true nightmare is yet to come.

Part 3

Alright, now that 2 people have fallen, let me organise my thoughts.

First of all, the chillies are an absolute landmine, no question about it. Secondly, Yun Chang, Gan Qing and Mi Zhen's cooked food is, in a sense, more horrific than the chillies.

At least there's still some time before it's my turn so I can continue observing for now.

"General Xu Chu, it's your turn." Guo Jia urged little Xu Chu who was about to cry.

"*Shiku*... Xiao E~~~" Xu Chu looked at Dian Wei with puppy eyes, hoping to be saved.

"Don't cry Zhong Kang... Feng Xiao, let me eat her share for her."

"Though no help can be rendered by right, and no food besides what has been put into the cauldron can be eaten..." Guo Jia thought for a moment before continuing, "I'll make this an exception."

So you're allowing it then.

"Un, thank you very much." Dian Wei nodded at Guo Jia before turning to look at Xu Chu with kind eyes, "Alright Zhong Kong, go ahead and take something out. If it's something bad, I'll eat it for you."

"Xiao E~~~" Xu Chu looked gratefully at Dian Wei as she hesitantly brought her chopsticks to the hellhole while everyone waited with bated breaths.

And what was taken out was— Tofu.

"Ah! I brought that tofu." I hurriedly raised my hand as I said so. Hu~~~~ If it's my food, then Xu Chu will probably be safe.

"Looks like it's safe huh. Thank you xiao E, I'll eat this myself." Xu Chu seemed to feel relieved and dipped it in sauce before eating it.

"Ue~~~~ Though I'm alright, but it feels like this tofu has been given a weird taste from the soup." Xu Chu complained as she spat out her tongue, but she should probably be feeling grateful inside.

"Alright, my turn now." Dian Wei picked up her chopsticks— A carrot.

"What! Someone actually put in a whole carrot!" Hua Tuo exclaimed instantly, even though Dian Wei didn't actually react that much to it.

"..." Feng Xian raised her hand, and then explained. "I bought it for Red Hare's lunch, these were the extras."

Don't give us dog food oi! Maa, though it is better than some of the other food here, at

least cut it first before putting it in~~

Dian Wei was probably thinking as much, as the swollen carrot was difficult for her to put in her mouth. But she did what she could, and finally ate it as tears filled her eyes from the effort.

In any case, Dian Wei appears to be okay, next is Li Dian and Yue Jin–

“...” Li Dian held a chilli in her chopsticks.

“...” Yue Jin held a chilli in her chopsticks.

“... Please go ahead.” Guo Jia specially said to them. Seems like she doesn’t want to let them hesitate.

“Ahen.” “Ahen.”

The 2 did not reply, and wordlessly ate it one after another. ... Oi oi, you two are actually chewing it for so long... Ah, they just swallowed it.

“.,, 95 marks for spiciness. Yue Jin, what do you think?”

“I would say 100 marks, Li Dian.”

After they finished, they nonchalantly graded the chillies with red faces. But really, what is their standard for giving marks huh? I really don’t get it.

“Hou~~~~ To think you all withstood that...” Guo Jia said as she lightly clapped.

“Th, that’s really amazing you two.” Zhang Liao was the first one up from our side, “Un, my turn now...”

She got.... A piece of leaf... What is this?

“Hu, safe for now.” Zhang said as she heaved a sigh of relief, “Oh by the way, this lotus leaf was brought by me.”

Un? So that’s a lotus leaf?

“But are lotus leaves edible?” I asked.

“Why not? Though they are a little bitter, it’s a rather refreshing taste.” Zhang Liao said as a matter of factly as she ate the lotus leaf. “Wu! ... But after sitting in that soup for so long, they aren’t tasty anymore.”

I don’t think anything will still taste good after being dipped in that soup.

“My turn now.” Feng Xian used one hand to hold the Red Hare and the other to take something out with her chopsticks– A slice of ginger (after that, we found out that this was

brought by Xiahou Yuan who intended to prank her elder sister with it). No, it should be called a piece of whole ginger.

“...Ahen.” Without any hesitation whatsoever, Feng Xian placed the entire piece of ginger into her mouth and began chewing,

Ah, I’m salivating like mad just thinking about how acrid and spicy it must be.

“Ugh.” Tears filled Feng Xian’s eyes as she swallowed before saying. “So spicy~~~”

Of course it is!

But really, Feng Xian handled it really well with just such a small reaction.

But next is the one I am most concerned about.

“Gan Qing, if you think it’s too dangerous then just forfeit.” I hurriedly stopped her out of worry as I saw her pick up her chopsticks, hoping she would think it over.

At the end of the day, Gan Qing is not like the rest. She’s just a normal person so I’m worried whether she can take what might come.

But Gan Qing did not seem very happy at hearing what I said as she replied to me with creased eyebrows. “Xuan De, I don’t like hearing those kind of words.” She said as she reached out with her chopsticks. “As a fellow woman, as someone who wants to win, I am willing to fight for what I want and won’t give up until the very end.”

“Un, Gan Qing really is a forthright woman.” Yun Chang said as she nodded, impressed at what Gan Qing said.

Along with Gan Qing’s resolute eyes, I really couldn’t say anything more.

— She got celery, good thing it’s only a small stick.

“Oh~ I brought that.” Dian Wi said as she raised her hand.

Maa, this sort of ingredient is pretty normal.

“...” “...” “...”

Un? In the short time when Dian Wei raised her hand, the Xu state 3 had already picked their food out of the cauldron. Wait, weren’t we supposed to do it one by one? Why did they do it together?

Maa, never mind. I looked at what they had picked — Stone, stone, and stone.

... Is it just me or, or did they pick out stones? And they don’t look like ordinary stones either.

“Umm, who brought these?” Guo Jia with creased eyebrows as she looked at the stones,

The Xu state 3 put down their chopsticks and raised their hands slowly.

So it's they themselves who brought the stones!

“We did.” “Because you said ingredients, so we did bring ingredients~~~ Though they're ingredients for making jade.” “We didn't just pick these up from the ground any old how too, these are premium jade stones too.”

(TL: It's wordplay that's impossible to bring in English. Basically Liu Bei had asked them to bring 食材 (shicai) or food ingredients, which they thought was 石材 (shicai) or rock materials.)

Maa, it's true that I'm to blame for not making things clearer, but why would someone think that they should bring rocks over to someone's place for dinner?

And no matter how premium the jade is, it can't be edible...

“You 3 better think this through... If you eat this, you might—” Guo Jia reminded them when she saw that no one else spoke.

Indeed, jade can't be eaten and it would probably be dangerous if they tried.

“... Unfortunately, we can only forfeit.” “... If I knew it would be like this, I wouldn't have went for the bottom of the cauldron.” “Damn it, what a waste~~” After xiao Yong's very dissatisfied rant, the 3 put down their chopsticks very unwillingly and forfeited.

I guess I should commend you 3 for even being able to take those heavy jade stones out with your chopsticks.

But just like that, another 3 people have dropped out huh~~~ Not even 1 round has passed and there are already 5 casualties... This game truly is scary. I think that this game should conclude in just a few rounds.

I looked around at everyone's faces, and it felt like they were thinking that they wanted to back out but it was a hard-to-come-by chance... As for myself, I felt like the prize was okay, and I was in it just to participate along with everyone else but now I feel like backing out would be a wise decision.

“Big brother do your best, it will be us soon.” Yun Chang encouraged me as she held my hand.

“Ha~~”

Un... Just from the atmosphere alone, it doesn't seem like I can back out easily.

“A-re~~ I got a jade stone as well~~~ I forfeit~~~”

!!!

Just then, Hua Tuo said in an unusually drawling tone.

“Maa, if it’s like that, it can’t be helped...” Guo Ji seemed to be unsatisfied but she did not pursue the matter and seemed to imply that those who want to back out may do so.

“Me now!” Yi De seemed to very happy for some reason and reached out with her chopsticks and brought it out instantly, the quickest person to pick something out thus far, “What is this huh? Maa, never mind! I’m starving already.”

I don’t know what Yi De picked as she put it in her mouth and swallowed it before I could see.

“Oh~~” Guo Jia cheered happily and clapped lightly, “Please learn from her, everyone... What was that, ah yes, this is how adults eat. Our game can only end quickly if everyone eats like this.”

More like our nightmare will end more quickly! It’s not like everyone can be like Yi De and swallow without chewing at all. Moreover, wouldn’t this just hasten our end?

“... Yi De, what was it that you ate? What does it taste like?” I asked out of concern, hoping that nothing untoward would happen to my little sister.

“I don’t know. I’m very hungry so I just swallowed it down without chewing.” Yi De said happily, upon which I could hear her stomach growling... As they say, hunger is the best spice after all.

“Xuan De, you’re up next.” Meng De suddenly called out to me, and seemed to be eagerly anticipating what would happen to me...

“Big brother do your best!” Yun Chang was cheering me on from the side. But what help was encouragement in a gamble...

So—

I stuck my chopsticks in deep and made for the bottom, searching for the jade stones.

Though I feel bad for the girls who are so serious about this, my heart can’t take this anymore and my only safe way out is to graciously forfeit after picking a jade stone.

Found it! ... Un... It’s hard to pick up, how the heck did Hua Tuo and the Xu state 3 do it? ... Come over here, you... It slipped away again! ... No good, if this keeps us, the others will get suspicious... Damn it!! ... Alright! I got a firm grip!

“You’re it!” I yelled out loud as I swiped out what was in my chopsticks in one go!

—- A-re? Why is the jade stone burnt like charcoal? And doesn’t this shape look like...

Meat stew?!

“Ah, th, that beef stew was from me.” Yun Chang stammered shyly as she saw that I had picked her food.

To think, to think I... But why is this ‘meat’ so hard?

“No, I made that meat stew!” All of a sudden, Gan Qing slammed the table and yelled at Yun Chang. “I made meat stew too! What Xuan De is eating is definitely mine!”

The same dish! The same level of cooking! To think they clashed head on!

“I made the meat stew!”

“I made it!”

The two of them began arguing immediately.

Whoever made it doesn’t matter, my fate has been decided. No matter how I think about it, this scene is exactly the same as before...

Hai, I’ve gone this far already, and I no longer have a legitimate reason to back out. I can only hope that these 2 have improved their cooking skills.

Ahen~ I put the piece of ‘slightly hard meat stew’ into my mouth and intended to swallow it without chewing just like Yi De. But, of course, things never go as simple as I hope for.

Wu! Ue~~

What is this? Just placing it in my mouth induces a strong wave of nausea. Could it be trauma from the last time? Though it does seem better than before, just from the nausea, I can conclude that they have not actually improved much.

Speaking of which, this meat is really hard. It will probably scratch my throat if I swallow without chewing.

As I thought so, I carefully chewed in—

Guee~~ This meat has a lot of juice in it~~~ But the taste is so weird, it’s a little sweet and for some reason has some Chinese medical herb taste... Ah the strong attack on my senses is overwhelming me!

I’m dying! I’m dying!

“”How is it?”” A nervous Yun Chang and an eager Gan Qing asked me simultaneously. Of course, there’s no way I can tell them that it’s nasty.

“Un, you’ve improved.” I said with a bitter smile.

Well just a teensy bit of improvement. If it weren't for my sufficient mental preparations, I would have been carried in like Xiahou Dun.

"Is, is that so." "That's great." Though the 2 of them gave different replies, they seemed rather pleased with the review I gave them.

"Un, seems like you made it." Meng De said and seemed somewhat unsatisfied.

"My turn now." Yun Chang said with a scarlet face as she reached out with her chopsticks. "This is it!"

— Chilli

"O-tto, looks like you got the prize huh!" Before Yun Chang could even react, Gan Qing had already walked up to Yun Chang and gave a sarcastic comment.

... But she's right, looks like Yun Chang did indeed step on a landmine.

But it feels like this chilli is different from before~~

"I didn't put this chilli in?~~~" Guo Jia said dubiously with creased eyebrows. Looks like this chilli really is different from the ones before.

Just then, one person's hand rose up high.

This person was Meng De.

"M, my lord!" Guo Jia exclaimed in surprise.

"When I saw you go out this afternoon, I realised that it was for preparing the ingredients." Meng De said, and picked out something from the cauldron— My tofu. "I saw your chillies and thought I'd bring some chillies of my own as well. However, the chillies I brought, are from Jing state."

Ahen, Meng De ate the tofu after she finished.

"You actually brought chillies from Jing state! Chillies from there are the spiciest in all of the Central Plains!"

What?! ... I didn't think that Meng De would be so sadistic in a time like this.

Yun Chang looked terrible, but she still brought the chopsticks to her mouth. She stared right at the chilli in her chopsticks, while she uttered under her breath, "For the reward, for the reward..."

And then, she put it inside her mouth--

"Yun Chang!" I cried out in concern as I watched Yun Chang begin chewing.

Yun Chang shut her eyes tight as she moved her teeth slowly and chewed the small chilli. Even though I was just looking, even I was terribly nervous.

“Uhn.” Yun Chang swallowed, but her eyes were still shut. After a long while, Yun Chang finally said slowly, “Let me lie down for a while.”

And as she said so, she lay down on the table.

“General Guan Yu, won’t you forfeit?”

“... I,” Yun Chang said weakly as she lay on the table, “I can still continue, I’ll recover.”

At this, Guo Jia did not say anything more.

And just like that, the first round of the game came to an end. However the game hasn’t ended. And because of the chillies from Jing state, the end of the game seems ever closer than before.

Part 4

“And so, another round has ended just like that.” Guo Jia said as she played with the celery she had picked out, making a *gachi* *gachi* sound. “I think we should be able to conclude the game with this round.

At this time, Meng De was the one left standing on her side.

As though they were cursed, people went down one by one in horrific fashions.

“Th, this meat... I can’t.”

“That’s right, though it’s not a chilli, this is too...” Dian Wei’s chopsticks slipped from her hands and she collapsed before she could finish her statement.

At the start of the second round, Xu Chu and Dian Wei stepped on the absolute worst landmines and collapsed before they were carried out.

And when it came to the third round, disaster struck Li Dian and Yue Jin.

“...” Yue Jin’s chopsticks held a chilli (looks like the Jing state one).

“...” Li Dian’s chopsticks held a chilli (looks like the Jing state one).

I must say, these 2 have really terrible luck, seeing as they’ve had chillies every round. But what truly amazed me was their willpower that has allowed them to last through 2 chillies thus far.

But—

“... I still think that Yi state chilli has a deeper taste.” Yue Jin said as she collapsed onto the table with a deep red face after eating the chilli.

“... Jing state chilli is indeed good, I give a full 100 marks.” Li Dian gave her review as her hands trembled uncontrollably after eating the chilli before collapsing onto the table as well.

— From the results, seems like 3 times is the absolute limit.

As for our side, there were some who left their seat, but this was after what happened to Li Dian and Yue Jin.

Mi Zhen was still a little kid, and it wasn’t good for her to stay hungry for too long so Gan Qing bade her to go and have some food inside first so she could sleep early.

“No, I want to continue...” Mi Zhen tried to protest but her stomach was growling profusely and her eyes were already closing.

“Don’t push yourself too much.” Gan Qing said with concern to Mi Zhen and shook her shoulders so she could stay awake a little while more, “I’ll bring her to go eat first. But let me

say this, I am not forfeiting!” Gan Qing then brought Mi Zhen to the back after saying so.

Nobody had any objections, since Mi Zhen needed someone to look after her.

As for Meng De, from the first round up till now, all she had been getting was my tofu.

As for me, apart from the first round, I hadn’t gotten any landmines.

And so, just like that, the 7 of us entered the fourth round.

“Geh, I feel a little disgusted after what I’ve been eating~~” Zhang Liao said with a pale face as she covered her mouth and reached into the cauldron with her chopsticks. “Th, this one then.”

Zhang Liao picked– Pork ribs. Looks a little uncooked despite being inside for so long.

“Ah, I brought that!” Yi De exclaimed happily. “I was planning to eat that myself too. You sure got it good, Zhang Liao!”

“Ha... Though this is not bad in and of itself, but after soaking in this soup...” Zhang Liao said helplessly and made to eat it.

And at that very moment–

Wang! *Wang*!

“Waa!!!!~~~”

Red Hare, who had been obediently in Feng Xian’s arms, suddenly barked when it saw the pork ribs in Zhang Liao’s chopsticks, which frightened Zhang Liao who had been apprehensive of Red Hare all this while.

“Wh, what’s the matter? Red Hare.” Feng Xian hurriedly hugged Red Hare tight so that it could not jump onto Zhang Liao.

“D, don’t come over–” Zhang Liao said fearfully as she stood up and backed out toward the courtyard as her pupils dilated as she looked at Red Hare while her lips were open and quivering, as though she were looking at a monster.

“Zhang Liao! Throw away the chopsticks in your hands!” Yun Chang shouted anxiously at Zhang Liao. Only then did I realise that Zhang Liao was still holding on to the chopsticks which held the pork ribs.

“Ah? Ah!” Zhang Liao flung the pork ribs away once she realised it.

Oi oi oi, this is way too high!

Zhang Liao threw the pork ribs into the air, on a trajectory which was aimed towards us.

— A-hen.

“Un?”

All of a sudden, Yo De flew from her seat and opened her mouth wide and ate the meat in mid-air.

“Thank you for the treat.” Yi De said as she spat the bone out.

“Red Hare, don’t eat that, your stomach will be bad.” Feng Xian admonished Red Hare, who was now a lot more obedient.

“Hu~~” Zhang Liao heaved a sigh of relief as she saw that Red Hare’s attention wasn’t on her anymore.

Feng Xian patted Red Hare’s head lightly to punish it, and then brought out a carrot from her bag. Looks like she didn’t put them all into the cauldron.

Ah, I really envy Red Hare. I want to eat something normal too.

“Out!” Just then, Guo Jia yelled out unhappily.

“Un?”

“Ah, it should be my turn now.” Feng Xian said as she put down the carrot and made to pick something out from the cauldron.

“No, I’m not talking about that.” Guo Jia grabbed Yi De’s hand. “Lord Zhang Fei, Lord Lu Bu, Lord Zhang Liao. — You 3 are disqualified. To put it simply, you 3 are now forced to retire from the game.”

!!!

“W, why!”

“Being disqualified all of a sudden...”

“That’s right, at least give us a reason why.”

Naturally, all 3 protested this but Guo Jia was calm as she explained. “Though I didn’t specially say it, it is obvious—” Guo Jia pointed at the 3 in turn as she continued, “Lord Zhang Liao gave the food she took to someone else without permission, Lord Lu Bu took out something that wasn’t from the cauldron to eat, Lord Zhang Fei ate someone else’s food without permission.

... She’s right though.

“That’s way too nitpicky!”

“And the carrot I took out wasn’t even for myself...”

“I didn’t give my food to General Yi De, she ate it herself.”

“Objections overturned.”

Beh—

Everyone stuck out their tongues in dissatisfaction.

But thinking about it another way, it is as she said, Yi De and the rest did violate the rules.

After a long while of protest with no results, the 3 could only give up reluctantly and head to the eating room.

And so, there were only 3 participants, no survivors, left in the main hall— Me, Meng De and Yun Chang... Ah, there’s 4 including Gan Qing.

Really, I didn’t expect things would progress so quickly.

Yun Chang’s POV

Though I feel bad for my little sister and the rest, I am thankful for this situation as we can quickly enter the final stages of the game.

It was great that I managed to withstand the attack from the chilli in the first round. As expected, there’s no rainbow if there’s rain.

But I know full well, that as we closer we get to the end, the stronger the opponents that are left are.

I lowered my head and looked toward Lord Cao Cao, and saw that she still had her signature confident smile on her.

“... Maa, in any case, it’s my turn now.” Big brother seems to have regained his composure and reached into the cauldron with his chopsticks.

Actually, I had seen through big brother’s actions, and I know that he has been trawling the bottom of the cauldron in the hopes of picking a jade stone. I, too, have been cheering him on in the hopes he may be able to get out of this game safe but what was truly surprising was that even I had a hard time lifting the jade stones out.

Exactly how did Hua Tuo pick it out? Not only is it slippery, it’s also heavy. Have we all judged her wrongly? Or could it be that there’s some technique to it?

“Ah... Celery huh.” Big brother said as he took what he had picked out of the cauldron and placed it in his mouth with a look of pain.

By now, most of everyone's ingredients has been exposed. There were some who have not admitted to any ingredients thus far, but I doubt that should pose a problem.

"Now then, next is me." I said as I picked up my chopsticks and reached into the cauldron.

Maybe the others don't know yet, but for me, I came to realise that there's a small trick to this game after 4 rounds. Though I call it a trick, it is nothing more than feeling with your chopsticks. Overall, vegetable leaves are the safest, and it is easy to discern their somewhat crunchy feel.

But... Vegetable leaf, vegetable leaf... Why are there none?

I frantically swirled my chopsticks around the bronze cauldron.

Big brother's tofu then... None either~~~

No, it's not that there aren't any anymore... It's that all the vegetable leaves have disintegrated into the soup.

Who did it?!

I looked angrily at Lord Cao Cao, who only smiled in response. But with this smile, I finally understood what went on.

Lord Cao Cao has destroyed all the vegetable leaves before I noticed!

I really cannot underestimate her huh~~ As expected, she is a strong opponent.

Eh! No choice, if it's like this, I can only choose between the spicy gingers or the carrots that are swollen from absorbing the soup.

As I thought so, my chopsticks chanced upon something— A carrot.

No way about it— Ahen.

Geh, no matter how many times I eat it, the taste of the soup is really unbearable. Even though I'm someone who likes strong tasting foods, I simply can't stand this somewhat sourish thing and feel nausea every time I eat.

"My turn now." Meng De said as she picked up her chopsticks.

For the past few rounds, there has been one point that has been bugging me.

Why? Why has Lord Cao Cao— Why does she always get the tofu that big brother put inside the cauldron?!

Meng De's POV

— Tofu, good.

It's only the fourth round but so many have already retired due to all the dangerous foods and special events such that only 3 of us are left.

Of course, I didn't actually arrange for all of this. Don't think that I always use schemes for everything. I actually adhere to the principle of fairness in competitions.

But though fairness is important, competition is the key.

I looked at Guan Yu. From her expression, seems like she doesn't understand why I always get tofu each time. Maa, I don't blame her, not being able to tell why is quite normal.

As for how I did it, well, it's actually quite simple. I had moved all the tofu to my side from the very beginning.

The structure of the bronze cauldron consists of a stove in the center with a circular metal plate around the stove. It is in this metal plate which we stir our ingredients. Since Yun Chang sits opposite me, she can never reach to the part of the plate in front of me.

And I, of course, can get the tofu easily.

The amount of tofu left at this point should be sufficient to last me for a few more rounds so as long as luck runs out for Xuan De and Guan Yu, this game is mine.

Part 5

TL: Last part of volume 2 extras.

“Alright! Now that there are just 3 left, let’s change the rules up a bit.” Guo Jia clapped as she said so after Meng De finished eating the tofu, and then turned to Meng De. “My lord, that should be okay right.”

“Maa, you’re the one who decides what goes on in the game.” Though Meng De agreed to it, she looks exasperated at Guo Jia’s words.

And for some reason, a very ominous feeling surged in my heart. I had the feeling that Guo Jia’s next words were definitely not going to make things easy for us.

“Un,” Guo Jia nodded as an utterly horrific smile floated on her face. “Well then, will you 3 please pick something out?”

Un? Isn’t this the same as before?

I looked over at Yun Chang and Meng De as I thought so, and as expected, those 2 were unable to understand what had changed either.

“Maa maa, don’t think too much about it.” Guo Jia said as she saw that we were worried about what was to come. “Just like what we’ve done so far, you still have to eat it.”

We 3 looked at each other, and then picked up our chopsticks at the same time.

I don’t know what Meng De and Yun Chang were thinking as they reached in with their chopsticks, but as for me, I just relied on my instincts and scoured the broth for (fake) food.

As long as it’s not a chilli, anything is good... You’re it!

—- Meat stew!

I slapped my forehead in anguish. Was it all over now?

“D, damn it.” Yun Chang, who was sitting to my right, picked out the chilli that all of us least wanted to pick out. Looking at the shape, it’s probably the Jing state variant.

And while I and Yun Chang were drowning in the abyss of despair, Meng De picked out another tofu of mine.

“Alright, what now?” Meng De excitedly asked Guo Jia. She’s probably on cloud nine now, seeing as we are sure to lose.

Hai, forget it, I admit defeat. I better prepare myself to eat this.

However, Guo Jia said calmly, “Now then, you 3 shall pass your item to the next person in

counterclockwise order who will eat it.”

“Hah?!”

“What!?”

“... It’s over.”

Meng De accepted the reality before her while I and Yun Chang did not understand immediately what happened.

So to explain what will happen, Yun Chang will eat the meat stew, Meng De will eat the chilli, and I will eat the tofu. — Looks like we’re eating the stuff that each of us brought.

What a coincidence.

“Alright, don’t hesitate any longer. Pass your item to the next person in counterclockwise order now.” Guo Jia urged.

Guo Jia’s smile did not extend to her eyes, and gave me a chill that ran down my spine.

Yun Chang POV

I took a close look at the plate that contained the meat stew which I received, and found that this was something I made, and not Gan Qing’s.

Now that I think about it, this is the first time I’m eating something I made myself.

But since Xuan De said it’s okay, the taste can’t be too bad.

—Ahen

Ue~~~~~

From the moment I inserted it into my mouth, a disgusting taste exploded on my tongue, inducing a strong wave of nausea.

Wh, what is this taste? Why is it so sweet when it’s meat? Did I add in too much honey? But all I added was one pail. And it’s so hard, I can’t chew it at all~~~~

But still, I kept on chewing, to give myself confidence to swallow. But no matter how much I chewed, my tongue rejected the meat in my mouth and the nausea only accumulated.

I had no choice but to use my martial bravery, and concentrated my bravery from my whole body as sweat streamed down my body, and force myself to swallow.

— Uhn.

Un? What happened? Why is the world spinning, and why does it seem like I'm lying on the ground?

No good, I must get up.

My thoughts were not going through to my limbs as my brain was addled by the shock from what I had swallowed.

Finally, I gave up and lay motionlessly on the ground.

Ah, is this the meat stew I made? ... L, looks like I still have a long way to go in my cooking skills huh~~~

In the next instant, I lost consciousness, and when I woke up again, I would find myself in the inner room.

Meng De POV

What a farce this is.

After all my hard work I put in to avoid all the risks, now I have to eat the very Jing state chilli that I put in myself.

I sized the chilli as I picked it up. It's not big, and basically can be eaten in one bite.

'*It's okay, it will be okay.' I told myself. 'If Yun Chang can withstand eating one then why not me?'

I steeled myself and ate the chilli in one mouth.

I held it in my mouth as I was frozen by fear and did not dare to chew down.

Perhaps I can just swallow it... No, it's too pointy, my throat will be scratched.

Do I really have to chew it?

Alright, I'll start at the center and then quickly swallow.

It's okay, it will be okay. I reassure myself once more.

— *Chew*

Wu!!!!

Though I only chewed it softly, I could feel an intense flame run down my tongue to my stomach and ignite the acid instantly. A strong impulse to spit the chilli out hit me then and there, but my will would not allow me to do so.

In just the blink of an eye, I could feel that even the tips of my ears were burning, and it was so painful that I couldn't even open my eyes which were overflowing with tears by now.

I don't know how I overcame the flames in my mouth, but I do know that I did not hold on at the bronze cauldron. On this, I have to admit Guan Yu is better than me.

Half a minute ago, Meng De and Yun Chang were carried into the inner room.

At this time, only I and Guo Jia, who was the judge, stood at the table before the bronze cauldron.

Though I don't know what happened, it seems like I've won.

Though I don't know how I'm going to use the reward later, in any case, what matter is that I've won.

"Lord Liu Bei, don't think you've won just yet." Guo Jia said as she smiled, as though she read what I was thinking. "Until you're proven to be alright after eating that tofu, everything is up in the air."

After hearing that, I nearly laughed.

"Maa, isn't this just an ordinary piece of tofu?" I said as I picked up the piece of tofu with no hesitation and put it in my mouth.

— Ahen

— *Chew*

— Uhn

"..." I sat there quietly with Guo Jia for a few minutes before I said. "See, I'm alright."

"Un, indeed." Guo Jia nodded. "Well then, I'll head inside to take a look, and in a while I'll announce the results."

Gan Qing isn't back yet though~~~~~ Before I could say that, Guo Jia had parted the curtains and made for the inner room, while I stayed and waited in the main hall.

... Speaking of which, does everyone know? If you eat honey and tofu together, you will get diarrhoea.

(TL: Unable to confirm. It appears to be an Asian myth, never heard of it before though.)

In any case, back then, I wasn't aware, that the meat stew I ate, was Yun Chang's.

In just a few minutes, just as Guo Jia was about to bring me to the inner room and announce the results, I had to forfeit and back out to deal with my diarrhoea.

And because of that diarrhoea, I was unable to make it to the inner room that night, and could not enjoy an actual good hotpot meal.

Just like that, as I was clutching my stomach in pain, the night came to a close.

Ah, there's still more to this story.

After Gan Qing had put Mi Zhen to bed, she was very surprised when she came back as she was the only one left.

And by the rules, she had to eat 2 servings of food,

"I only picked 2 things at random and both times happened to be the tofu that Xuan De put in! Hehe, as I thought, we have good affinity huh~~~" Gan Qing said to me after it all ended, with a face of sheer unadulterated bliss.

Up till now, I still don't know how Meng De and Gan Qing were able to repeatedly pick my tofu.

Of course, Gan Qing, as the last survivor, was crowned the winner of the game. According to the rules, she can order one of us to do something.

I don't know if it was fate, or something else, but Gan Qing chose me.

But that, is a story for another time.

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Translated by [asd398](#)

Afterword

It was no small feat but finally, the story has reached the second volume. What was a small feat though, was half of summer passing by just like that. Though I feel bad about it, I have yet to touch my summer homework at all.

Ah, but first, to all the readers who have read up to this point, thank you.

The final chapter of this volume was actually supposed to be the third refusal of Xu state but for the sake of writing the extra story for volume 2, I had to keep writing until the discussion of heroes over wine.

And next up for my second volume extra story is– Yaminabe Chapter (Guo Jia’s entrance)

(TL: I translated it as Yaminabe (暗锅) as I am quite sure this originated from Japan. I ate steamboats for 20 years with friends and family and never knew of Yaminabe until I saw it in anime/manga. Though admittedly, I am not from China, so correct me if I’m wrong.)

Just like the hot springs chapter, this Yaminabe Chapter will be an extra long chapter, although this time, I’ll be updating it in parts so please forgive me.

And in the third volume, I will be writing more extra chapters, or perhaps I’ll make the third volume a volume for extra stories. But I know that there are people who want to see the main story (actually all you guys want is to see Zhuge Liang and the other characters that come later), so everything is up in the air. If anyone has anything to say, please write it in the discussion section so I can know what everyone thinks.

(TL: He did neither in the end. He wrote a full volume with the main story and he wrote a 47 part extra story. I’d just like to remind everyone that each part is equivalent to a whole chapter.)

Speaking of the third volume, the stories for later volumes will definitely be the Battle of Guandu and Riding Alone for Thousands of Miles. These are still being planned.

Up till now, 3 people have died, the pair of Han Fu and Pan Feng, and our old man Tao Qian. A moment of silence for them. Right now, they should be eating their packed rice and yelling “For the plot!”. Good, thanks for the support.

(TL: In the past, especially in Hong Kong, movies would pay extras a little bit of money and a packet of food (rice and vegetables and meat). They would usually be able to collect this once they finished their scenes so whenever a character dies, they are said to be able to collect their packed rice (领便当). This has continued to be used on Chinese net lingo.)

Don’t worry, I have had some ideas about making Han Fu and Pan Feng spit out their packed rice, but really, it’s just a thought.

(TL: Dead people stay dead in this series. At the most, they may appear in specials.)

What I wanted to say is a total mess but in any case, I have nothing more to say. I'm nearing my high school final examination but I haven't revised my work yet so updates in the future will be less regular.

In any case, I'll be resting for 2 days, and think about the story. At the same time, I'll be working on my English, but I just can't memorise the words. The original plan to do my homework bit by bit over summer has gone poof. (苦笑)

And that's that, I'll continue complaining in the afterword of the third volume. —- Hopefully, I can cure my laziness and finish the third volume before school starts.